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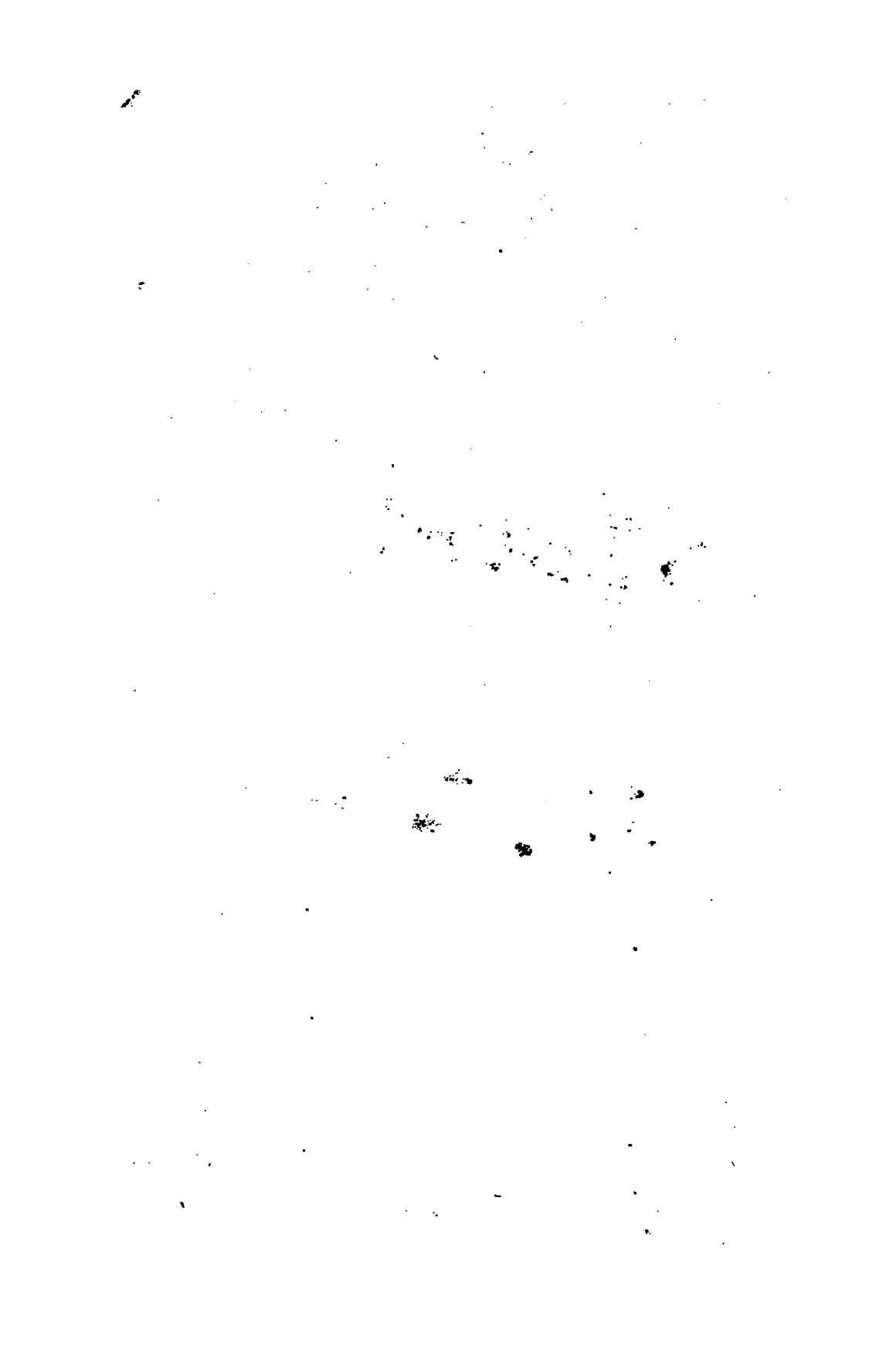
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**ILLUSTRATIONS**

OF THE

**PRACTICAL POWER OF FAITH,**

IN A SERIES OF

**POPULAR DISCOURSES**

ON PART OF THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER OF THE EPISTLE  
TO THE HEBREWS.

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**BY T. BINNEY.**

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"THIS IS THE VICTORY THAT OVERCOMETH THE WORLD—FAITH."

*Saint John.*

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**LONDON:**  
**HOLDSWORTH AND BALL,**  
18, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

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## P R E F A C E

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It will probably be expected, and perhaps it may be necessary, to accompany these discourses with a few prefatory remarks, addressed both to the friends for whose use they are primarily designed, and to the general reader, who, from whatever motive, may be disposed to consult them.

To his friends and former charge, the writer wishes to make three brief observations. In the first place.—He trusts that what was heard by them professedly with satisfaction, will be attended in the perusal not only with something like pleasure, but with a positive increase in the strength and activity of that great prin-

ciple, which it is the main object of the Lectures to illustrate. In the second place. He acknowledges that his original intention certainly was, to have published the entire series of Discourses on the whole chapter, as he conceived it would form but a moderate-sized volume ; finding, however, such expectation a mistake, he preferred the present course of presenting them with only a part of it, and that for two reasons,—one, that this is sufficient to answer all the ends contemplated by the publication; and the other, that, however he may regret the omission of certain characters which some had wished to be introduced, he should have felt it wrong to carry the work to an expensive extent. Lastly. He has to notice, that, instead of prefixing an inscription or dedication to the volume, he has prefixed, what he thought would be as acceptable and more useful, the concluding Discourse on the whole Epistle, and which is given nearly verbatim as it was written and delivered. May the wishes and prayers expressed in it be accomplished !

To the general reader, I think it may be allowable to offer one or two considerations, that may possibly mitigate the severity of criticism. Let it be remembered then, that this volume consists of *popular* discourses,—that is, discourses expressly and designedly constructed with a view to awaken the attention, rouse the faculties, and inform the understanding of a mixed or popular assembly. They were *written* with this view, and they were *read* in consistency with it. Now, this should be borne in mind. Composition is very different according as we write for the ear or for the eye; according as we establish and illustrate a principle in a piece intended for private perusal, or as we attempt the same thing in an address to a general auditory, enforcing it upon their feelings for practical purposes. The following Discourses are of this order. They were written to be *heard*—heard under the usual circumstances, that is, without the possibility of any part being *re-read* which was felt not to be sufficiently intelligible, and by persons the most of whom,

like the most of all similar assemblies, were, of course, unaccustomed to severe intellectual exercises: *Therefore*, a single thought is often largely expanded and variously expressed, that, as it were, it might rest for a time upon the mind of the audience, and be fully apprehended before succeeded by another. To sustain attention, the argument is declamatory; to make excitement beneficial, the declamation is argumentative. Illustrations and phrases are at times employed, that would be in bad taste in a set disquisition, but which, in a popular address, may be used not only with effect but propriety. The only exception to these remarks, and that, perhaps, but partial, is the first Discourse, which, not being committed to paper till after it was delivered, partakes more of the character of a written than a spoken composition.

Unquestionably, coincidences will be observed between parts of these Discourses and those of others on similar topics; how far one may be owing to the other it is impossible to say; sometimes we

are at a loss to determine whether a particular passage is the offspring of invention or of memory, and lately, I observed two or three striking similarities of expression and argument between this volume and one published since it has been in the press. I think it right, however, to say, that there is one place, and the only one of which I am conscious, in which the mode of illustration and remark were intentionally adopted from another writer. I refer to the tenth Sermon. I remember quite despairing of being able to describe the last trial of Abraham, when, happening accidentally to see Fuller on Genesis, I thought his observations so appropriate, that I founded nearly the whole of the Discourse upon them. This coincidence, then, is *not* accidental. How far it may extend I have not the means of judging, nor have I been anxious to inquire. Such knowledge could have been of no use. It might have shown me, indeed, the precise extent of my obligations, but it would not have conferred ability to cancel them.



These few observations are respectfully submitted to the general reader, who, of course, will think of the lecturer not as a friend, but as an author: as such, he trusts it cannot be wrong to state the principles upon which what he has written should be judged. After all, however, the great point is, to seek practical benefit from the perusal of the volume. Reader, I *know* some, who derived sensible advantage from the exposition presented thee; my sincere wish is, that, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, thou mayest derive even more than they.

T. B.

TRINITY SQUARE, NEWINGTON,  
*May 1, 1830.*

ERRATUM.

Page 142, line 1, *for excuses read excesses.*

**DEDICATORY DISCOURSE,**  
**ADDRESSED**  
**TO THE CHURCH AND CONGREGATION**  
**ASSEMBLING FOR WORSHIP**  
**IN ST. JAMES'S STREET, NEWPORT,**  
**ISLE OF WIGHT.**

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**"GRACE BE WITH YOU ALL."**

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## DEDICATORY DISCOURSE.

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HEB. XIII. 25.

*Grace be with you all.*

WE arrive, my brethren, this morning, at the conclusion of an engagement, which has occupied about two-thirds of the sabbaths of something more than three years. A number of very serious considerations are naturally excited by such a circumstance. Of these considerations, I design to notice a few of the most obvious and practical; and then briefly to illustrate the benediction of the text.

I do not hesitate to acknowledge, that I have often felt disposed to charge myself with temerity for attempting the engagement at all. I cannot reflect on the character of this epistle;

the grandeur of its subjects; the obscure and difficult passages which frequently occur in it; without being sensible that, to much necessary to be noticed, it is impossible for an elementary divine to do any thing like justice. I am ready, therefore, freely to confess that, all along, I have regarded the engagement, not only with the feelings of an instructor, but with those of a pupil. I have read, and thought, and written, not from the foolish conceit of being competent adequately to explain this important portion of God's word; but from the conviction that, by honestly attempting "to do what I *could*," I should be assisted to do something; and that I should unquestionably obtain great personal benefit, while systematically aiming at yours.

Now, I hope both these objects have in some degree been secured; but, that they have been secured to the largest extent, to the extent they *might* have been, it would be very absurd for either of us to affirm. They have been exposed, I doubt not, sometimes by the want of activity in *my* mind, sometimes



by the want of attention in yours. Occasionally, perhaps, just when more than ordinary research was required, the faculties may have been incapable of effort, or they may have improperly expended their strength upon lighter occupations; or physical indisposition may have prevailed, sufficient to prevent private labour, but not to interfere with public duty; or, unexpected occupations may have interrupted attention; or unseasonable and prolonged demands upon one's time, may have broken in upon the commenced engagement, and destroyed thoughts and feelings that could never be recalled. At other times, after much effort to ascertain the force of particular expressions, or to catch the scope of some involved process of argument, the mind may have been held in a state of anxious indecision, hesitating between views of apparent equal correctness, until the near approach of the hour of instruction warned us that something must be done, as it would soon be necessary for something to be said. In other cases, when all had been fully investigated, satisfactorily

determined, minutely planned and prepared for the public appearance; just *at* that appearance, the mind may have experienced a sort of eclipse; been oppressed and darkened; unable to recal its ideas, or, if it could, to express them with any thing like vigour or precision. These and similar circumstances, springing from the imperfections incident to our nature, independently of others that might spring from culpability, may, *on my part*, have interfered with our mutual advantage in the prosecution of the work which we terminate to-day.

On *your* part, various obstacles have, no doubt, often interposed, to prevent the benefit you might otherwise have obtained. It is not always possible for the hearer to feel equally interested, nor to command and sustain a uniform attention. You, too, "are encompassed with infirmity," and suffer like ourselves from mental vicissitudes. The fatigue of the body will oppress the spirit; domestic cares and secular anxieties will disturb the devotion of the best of men. Sometimes, however, other causes than these have operated. Have

you not caught yourselves, occasionally, in a state of such entire abstraction as actually to have forgotten where you were?—a particular remark, perhaps, has in a manner struck upon your mind, you have looked up as if to discover whence it proceeded, and you have wondered to find yourself recalled from some day-dream or other, with which your whole soul had been unconsciously absorbed! The argumentative garb in which it was often necessary to clothe our remarks, may, at one time, have required a greater effort on your part than you have been willing to make; at another time, you may have been unnecessarily absent from the house of God, when the subject of discourse was most remarkably adapted to your character and case. Some of you, perhaps, may never have thought of improvement at all; you may never have reflected on what *you* had to do, nor have justly appreciated what the minister was doing; you may never once have retired to read the passage that had been explained, to recollect the remarks by which its obscurities were removed, or the spiritual and

practical lessons it was employed to enforce. You may never have prepared your minds for the anticipated service, by seriously considering the subject or the verses to which you *knew* your attention would be called. You just came, and heard, and went;—came without prayer, heard without impression, and went without benefit;—made a passing remark, perhaps, to some neighbour or friend at the close of the engagement, and there the matter, as it would seem, ended for ever! But, let me tell you, *it did not end for ever*. It may there have ended with *you*, but it did not end with God. You, possibly, might wish never to recur to it again; but He will. There is a time coming when, for the contempt thus virtually indicated towards God's house, and God's service, and God's day, He, most assuredly, will bring us into judgment.

In spite, however, of these and many other painful recollections, we still hope that something has been done. It is proper to think that we have sometimes been assisted, in consequence of your private and domestic suppli-

cations; that many of you have not forgotten to cooperate with the preacher, by personal attempts to retain and fix the truth in the memory, and to secure the influence of the Spirit on him and on yourselves. We are disposed to hope, too, that, occasionally, we have imparted impressions which some of you "would not willingly let die;" because we have reason to believe that we have in some degree succeeded in increasing your acquaintance with the fulness and richness of the divine volume; in exciting a desire for enlarged and accurate scriptural information; and in leading you to delight, more than you did, in simply "searching" for yourselves "the Word of God." Without, however, consuming time by imagining what *may* have been done, suffer me to remark that there are two things which certainly *ought* to have been done; two points, in relation to which, I really think it will be very mournful if we are not conscious of some considerable improvement, as the result of the instructions to which we have attended.

In the first place; considering that the whole



drift of the apostle's argument, that all the essence of his reasoning, and all the force of his illustrations, are employed to establish and depict the peculiar priesthood of the Son of God; we ought, I think, with respect to *this subject*, to feel an increased persuasion of its magnitude and importance. It is this which interprets the Jewish dispensation; which gives significance and beauty to its diversified appointments; and which, considered as a *fact*, constitutes the strength and glory of our own. In the repeated representations which have been brought before us of the "Apostle and High Priest of our profession," we have seen so much of the dignity of his person; the necessity of his sacrifice,—its reality, its efficiency, its nature; the perfection of his character; the importance, and grandeur, and graciousness of all his past acts, and of all his present occupations; that we cannot fail, I should suppose, to regard these and kindred subjects with a persuasion more profound, and a feeling more intense, than before. The Epistle to the Hebrews includes many statements, singularly explicit, respecting

the offices sustained by Christ in the work of our redemption; respecting that blood “without which there is no remission,” and the open access we now have “into the holiest of all.” It is true, these subjects are asserted, more or less distinctly, in every Gospel and in every Epistle; but, in the Hebrews they are not only asserted; they are largely illustrated,—they are argumentatively enforced,—they are triumphantly established,—they are “commended” to our understanding as well as to our conscience; and, I repeat, that, from the frequent and prolonged attention they have had to receive from us, we ought to be so convinced of their certainty, and so warmed by their worth, as to be completely fortified against every species of error, and every temptation to indifference.

In the second place; considering the fulness with which we discoursed on the eleventh chapter of the book, we ought, I think, to be conscious of an increase of *faith*, as a practical and consolatory principle. We entered, you may remember, very largely into this subject. We

examined the different characters enumerated in the chapter,—Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, and others. We followed them through their various, prolonged, and complicated trials. We saw how their faith was illustrated and displayed; how it stimulated obedience, promoted submission, alleviated sorrow; how it led them to live as ever realizing the invisible and the future; how ready it rendered them either to suffer or to act; how, when the principle was vigorous, it was only necessary for a thing to be known to be the Divine will, and they were at once prepared to attempt or sustain it. In this way, we had the power of faith placed before us in every possible aspect, under every species of trial, and in all varieties of circumstance; and I certainly do think, that we *ought* to be conscious of some improvement in ourselves, from these reiterated representations of its virtue and vigour. *Has it been thus?* Since we received the lessons, we have had frequent opportunities of reducing them to practice. *Have we done it?* In the hour of affliction, has faith taught us to acquiesce in the will of

God; to regard all his providential dispensations as wise and holy, benevolent and best? In the "day of prosperity," has it directed and purified our joy; repressed vain boasting, but stimulated grateful praise; taught us to receive every thing as a *gift*, and to associate it with devout conceptions of the Giver? In temptation, have we acted "as seeing Him who is invisible?" have we resisted evil from the recollection of his presence? have we virtually counted "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt?" As a general practical principle, have we learnt, *by faith*, to have a constant "respect to the recompense of reward?" Are we really influenced, in a manner approaching to a *habit*, by the "perfect persuasion of things not seen, and the confident expectation of things hoped for?" Brethren, I have again to repeat, that, from the nature and number of our lessons on this subject, we really *ought* to feel, if not absolutely "*strong* in faith, giving glory to God," at least *somewhat sensibly stronger than before*.

## II.

We now proceed briefly to illustrate the benediction of the text—"Grace be with you all."

The word "grace" has a variety of acceptations in the New Testament. Sometimes, for instance, it signifies the eternal love and favour of God towards the church;—"Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, according to his purpose and grace." Sometimes it is applied to what we might almost term the same principle under another form, that is, to the principle which prompted "the only-begotten of the Father" to become the Redeemer of mankind;—"Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich." Sometimes it describes the nature of the evangelical constitution as contrasted with the covenant of works;—"Ye are not under the law, but under grace." Sometimes it denotes the happy relation to God sustained by a pardoned and

justified man;—"We have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." Sometimes it refers to the "glory and honour," which, at the coming judgment, are to be conferred upon the church; hence Peter speaks of "the grace that is to be brought unto us, at the revelation of Jesus Christ." It is applied also to the virtues of the Christian character;—"As ye abound in every thing, see that ye abound in this grace also." But the sense in which we have at present to do with it, is that in which it describes that assistance and help, that favourable and blessed influence, which is bestowed upon the believer, by which he realizes the happiness, and displays the virtue, of a servant of God. In this acceptation it occurs in our Lord's encouraging address to Paul,—  
"My grace is sufficient for thee." In this acceptation it is principally used in the devout wishes expressed by the apostle, at the beginning and the end of most of his letters. In this acceptation we conceive it to be employed here, and in this, therefore, we shall consider it in our subsequent remarks.

The apostle, then, wishes the Divine assistance, "the supply of the Spirit," to be imparted to *all* to whom he wrote; to make them happy, and to make them good; to "sanctify them wholly," and to keep them so. Now, what I want you to observe is, the vast extent of this wish; and I want you to learn from it, the unlimited resources of God, both as to knowledge and power; the confidence, therefore, with which you may apply to and depend upon him; and the necessity that there is for your doing this.

Observe, then, the vast extent of this wish; and for this purpose, think of such things as the following. The Christians in Judea, or say in Jerusalem, to whom this epistle is supposed to have been addressed, were very numerous. At one time "three thousand," at another "a great multitude," are spoken of as added to the church. Besides these public and remarkable conversions which are specified in the history, it is reasonable to suppose, that the work privately advanced, by the ordinary instructions of men who, either as apostles or otherwise,

were devoted to its promotion, and who, to secure its success, were "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost." There would also be the influence of the converts themselves on their surrounding connexions; and this must have been great, from the novelty, and nearness, and lustre of the facts which operated upon them, and which, when once believed and felt, must have excited extraordinary activity and zeal. "The Word of God," indeed, it is said, "grew mightily and prevailed;" and it had done so, more or less, for several years at the time when this epistle was written; and, although much is to be admitted, by way of drawback from all this, on account of the gradual decay of zeal, and the necessary removal of the converted "strangers" from Jerusalem, and the desolating and dispersing effects of persecution; yet, as it is also to be recollected that there were seasons of "rest," when this and surrounding churches, "walking in the comfort of the Holy Ghost," were "multiplied," I still think, that we are fairly warranted in saying, that this wish had respect to a very great



number of persons. Then, the next thing to be observed is, that it would seem very likely, that this number included persons of almost every rank. It is true, the great body of the faithful consisted, most probably, of what we should term the lower or labouring classes; but it is also true, that the church did reckon among its members, even in Jerusalem, and in the age of the apostles, persons both of property and rank. Joseph and Nicodemus were such; Barnabas also was such,—he had property in land; many besides him seem to have been in similar circumstances, but, selling their property, and throwing the produce into the common stock, they reduced themselves, as it were, to a level with the rest. This state of things, however, did not, probably, continue long; indeed, it was never a matter of obligation or duty for any one to part with his possessions, so that things would soon return to their natural course, and, by the time this letter was received, I dare say there were included in the church, persons of all degrees of property, and of all varieties of external circumstance. Besides, I might

have mentioned, that it is worthy of remark, that at one time "a great number of the priests were obedient to the faith," so that really, altogether, it seems a very legitimate inference that the wish respected, not only a vast number of persons, but persons of various ranks and classes of society. Again. There would be intellectual as well as civil and circumstantial differences among this multitude. There would be all possible varieties of mental character,—varieties resulting both from natural capacity and from the influence of education. There would be, I apprehend, all gradations, from the lowest extent of original endowment to very high forms of talent and genius. There would be, also, the ignorant and unlettered of the people, and there would be those who were familiar with the then prevalent literature; those who understood nothing but the barbarous dialect at that time spoken in Judea, and those who could consult Moses and the Prophets in the ancient Hebrew, and who, besides this, might be acquainted with the writings of illustrious foreigners. There were the acute, the specu-

lative, the learned; this seems to be supported both by the character of the epistle, and by the well-known fact that several, who seem to have been persons of ability and leisure, went out from this church, and corrupted others by what we might term their philosophical Judaism; we do not suppose that *all* who possessed intelligence and talent acted thus, and therefore we believe that many remained; many who were not inferior in learning, but greater in faith, and who were included in the benevolent concern of the apostle. Add to all this, in the last place, that there would be among the persons contemplated by Paul, moral and spiritual, as well as intellectual, differences. There were those who had been "in Christ" long "before" others; who were "aged disciples," and were waiting the summons to depart. Of many of these there would be the children, who, like Timothy, had been taught from infancy the Holy Scriptures, and by them been made wise unto salvation. There would be persons, also, just converted,—converted, too, from different degrees of practical departure from God, and

of different stations, ages, and temperaments. There would be, also, those who were tried with various kinds of affliction, either in their secular concerns, or in their family, or their persons;—those who had suffered persecution, imprisonment, and confiscation of goods. Besides all this, there would be the differences in the stature and features of the spiritual man,—in the degree in which sanctified excellence was possessed : there would be “babes,” “little children,” “young men,” and “fathers ;” among these, too, there would be particular weaknesses and defects ; the character of one would be imperfect in one respect, another in another, and so on ; they would thus, as a whole, be liable to all sorts of personal temptation, and exposed to every species of spiritual danger. Now, when you put these things together, you cannot but be struck, I think, with the extent and comprehensiveness of the apostle’s prayer ; when you thus think of the language “grace be with you *all*,” as having respect to such a multitude of persons,—a multitude including such varieties of class,

character, feeling, and circumstance,—you are, or you *ought* to be, impressed with the delightful view which it gives us of that God who was supposed, by the apostle, to be able and willing and ready to fulfil it.

We are thus taught, you see, by illustrating the words in this way,—the only way, in fact, by which we can perceive their fulness and force,—we are taught, how unlimited and immense is that assistance, which is ready to be given to all that ask it. Our wants never can exceed the Divine resources. Were this congregation ten times or a hundred times larger than it is, and were our circumstances and trials ten times or a hundred times more diversified than they are, still, there would be “grace” for all and for each of us in God. There is assistance of every kind, exactly appropriate to every character. All ranks of society, all classes of minds, can receive the peculiar and precise communications they require. There is something to be obtained exactly adapted to each stage of experience, and to all varieties of affliction. “My grace is sufficient,” is an an-

nouncement that may be addressed, with *equal* truth, to *every* Christian, in all ages of the world, in every condition of life, and of any kind of personal peculiarity.

Now, this teaches us to consider, how intimate and perfect is the knowledge which God has, of all our minds and characters, with all their properties and defects. It is *only* by possessing this knowledge that he can answer this prayer. Mere power is useless, and *may* be mischievous, without intelligence to guide it. Power, indeed, to accomplish a certain, definite object, implies an accurate acquaintance with that object, and with the way in which it may be accomplished. This union of knowledge and power, is what we mean when we speak about the Divine *ability* to bestow all manner of grace on every member of the church. It is thus that the omniscience of the Almighty, — the attribute which is so terrible to the wicked, becomes a subject of pleasing contemplation to the believer. “Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, and art acquainted with all my ways.” “Thou

understandest my thoughts afar off; there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether." Such reflections, to the man who feels that this Being is his enemy, are necessarily pregnant with agony and terror; but to his reconciled children they are soothing and delightful; they are the rational, as his promise is the authoritative, foundation for their expecting the fulfilment of the apostle's prayer; by the union of both, they *know*, as well as believe, that he is able to give "grace" suited and sufficient for them all.

Another lesson involved in the subject, is, the universal necessity of this Divine assistance. Whatever might be the property or the rank, the learning or the intelligence, of any of the Hebrews; however long they had sustained the Christian name; however far they had advanced in Christian attainment; whatever they had suffered,—whatever achieved; by whatever circumstances they were elevated above or distinguished from others;—yet, for *all* of them Paul felt grace still to be necessary, and therefore *for* all he solicited the boon. Hence, let

none of *us* imagine that we can do without God. "Let not the rich man glory in his riches; nor the mighty man glory in his might; nor the strong man glory in his strength; nor the wise man glory in his wisdom;" nor the poor man glory in his poverty, as if there were a charm in *that* which of necessity secured the favour of God;—but let each, of every class, seek for that poverty of spirit which may belong to all, and which at once prompts us to seek, and prepares us to enjoy, the communications of grace.

The language of the apostle is a prayer, and it is a prayer for others. It thus instructs us, both how we are to obtain the blessing, and, I was almost going to say, how we might impart it; for it almost amounts to this, when, through *our* intercession, others are assisted. Earnest *personal* supplication to God, however, is what we are to rely upon, as the appointed means by which grace is to be obtained. It is true, others may pray for us, as Paul prayed for the Hebrews,—and they may be successful; but be assured, the best proof that such prayers



*are* successful, will be found in our being individually taught to pray for ourselves. And what encouragement, my brethren, we have to do this! We are told of the ability of God, and of the benevolence that prompts him to communicate his gifts; we have received “great and precious promises;” his honour is pledged to their fulfilment; we are invited to come into his presence, and to plead them before him: we are informed that we have “a compassionate High Priest,” who is touched, even in heaven, with a feeling of the infirmities that encompass us on earth, and who has received of the Spirit to shed upon his servants; we are invited and urged to go with “boldness” to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and “find grace to help in every time of need:” we are assured, again and again, that God can supply *all* our wants; can enrich us with *all* knowledge and spiritual understanding; and can strengthen us with *all* might in the inner man;—because, he can do for us not only *according* to our requests, but *far above and beyond* all that we can either ask or

think,—all that the greatest master of language can express in words, and all that the most vigorous intellect can conceive in speculation! If this be not encouragement to prayer, it is impossible to find terms adequate to convey such encouragement at all.

Seek, then, my brethren, each of you for himself, the fulfilment of the apostle's desire, by making it continually your own. Seek for it, not only by direct supplication, but by such a serious attendance on the *means* of grace, such preparation for the sanctuary, and such a mode of hearing the word, as may be calculated to invite and not to repel the Spirit. Cherish a humble dependence on Divine aid. Pursue every thing in the spirit of devotion. Contemplate every thing in connexion with God. Frequently remember the certainty of the truths which have at present been established: that is, remember that there is no kind and no degree of assistance but what God can give; that there is no duty but what he can strengthen you to discharge; no sacrifice but what he can enable you to make;

no trial but what he can teach you to endure. Remember, that you can have no weakness but what he can correct; no besetting sin but what he can show you how to conquer; no corruption but what he can subdue. Confident, therefore, of these great and invigorating truths, you may each adopt as your own the language of the apostle,—“I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me.” “*His* grace is sufficient for all things; *His* power is perfected in weakness.”

Suffer me to conclude, by presenting to God, for all that are before me, this comprehensive supplication. “May grace be with you all.” May grace be with you that are rich, that you “may not trust in uncertain riches,”—that you “may lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven,” by faith in Him, “who, for your sakes became poor,”—that you “may be willing to distribute, ready to communicate,” usefully employing the “unrighteous mammon,” that when you leave all, and leave it you must, you may be admitted into everlasting habitations. May grace be with you that are poor, that you may be “rich in

faith,"—that you may "know in yourselves that you have in heaven a better, even an enduring substance:" that you may possess that eternal treasure, which dignifies the mean and enriches the indigent ; without which none can be great ; conscious of having which, you would not for worlds change places with those who have it not. May grace be with you that are fathers and masters of families, that you may be zealous for domestic religion, and exemplary in your conspicuous and important relations. May grace be with you that are young, that you may be obedient to parents ; that, in the anticipation of life, you "may learn to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness ;" that you may feel religion to be a "reasonable service," and contemplate it as the grand instrument for improving and perfecting your nature ; that you may be led to the cross, may imbibe the spirit, and follow the example, of Jesus Christ. May grace be with the aged, to prepare them for death ; and with the afflicted, to succour and to sanctify. May grace be with all and each of you, to enlarge knowledge, to

kindle zeal, to elevate devotion, to correct mistakes, to supply deficiencies, to advance and mature, to establish and to perfect. May grace pardon the defects of our ministrations; the errors inseparable from imperfection, and those involving culpability; the inadequate manner in which, too often, the truth has been seized, presented and enforced. May grace pardon *your* inattention, forgetfulness and sloth. May that grace, for which we pray now, be ultimately consummated in glory. May it then be seen that neither our preaching nor your hearing is in vain. "Satisfy us, O Lord, with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.— Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it."

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, that is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified;" and, "unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and

to present you perfect in the presence of his glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and honour, dominion and praise, world without end. Amen."



**ILLUSTRATIONS**

**OF THE**

**PRACTICAL POWER OF FAITH.**





# SERMON I.

## THE NATURE OF FAITH.

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HEB. XI. 1, 2, 6.

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen... By it the elders obtained a good report..... Without faith it is impossible to please [God]: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

THE Epistle to the Hebrews is one of the most remarkable of the apostolic compositions. Considered as a composition, it is obviously the production of no ordinary man. It is not to be denied, that, at times, it is rather difficult to determine the precise meaning of the writer, or to detect the exact point of his allusions. In general, however, the book is sufficiently perspicuous; even its darkest passages amply repay

the labour required to explore them; and not seldom is that labour lightened, by our contact with such as are distinguished for incomparable sublimity and beauty.

It is not enough, however, to regard the book as a remarkable composition. It is supposed to possess an inspired character, and to be invested with canonical authority. It is usually ascribed to the Apostle Paul. Independently of such arguments in favour of this opinion as it would be improper to present to you from this place, it may be observed, that there is much internal evidence in the writing itself to corroborate and support it. There are trains of abstruse thought; sudden and lengthened digressions; peculiarities of phrase; allusions to personal suffering; intimations of authority; strokes of pathos; abrupt practical appeals; and other distinguishing characteristics of what proceeded from the pen of that eminent Apostle and most extraordinary man.

There is nothing, we conceive, incompatible with the inspiration of any writing, in referring, in this way, to peculiarities of style and manner characteristic of the writer—the human instrument through whom the ideas are conveyed, and from whom they derive, so to speak, the *material* in which they are embodied. Of the mode of inspiration,—that is, of the way in which the

Infinite Mind adapted itself to the subordinate mind, so as to come into contact with it, and impart to it a portion of its own knowledge—of this, we can conceive nothing. We can infer, from general principles, the possibility of the fact itself; we believe its certainty, upon what appears to us indisputable evidence; but, of the manner in which it was effected, we are hopelessly ignorant. The possibility of the fact itself is sustained by the very same arguments which establish the Divine existence. He who made the mind, as he must necessarily understand its construction and capacities, must be able to have direct access to it if he please, and thus to communicate information, which could never be obtained in any other way. That this *might* be, it would be absurd to deny: that it *has been* we believe: but we believe it as a fact, the evidence of which is seen to be satisfactory, but the mode of which it is impossible to explain. We receive it, in short, just as we receive the appearances of nature, and the ultimate demonstrations of experimental science; which we know as facts, and as nothing else. The philosopher is well acquainted with the difference of the questions, *what?* *how?* as applied to the subjects of physical knowledge. He professes to furnish a reply only to the first. He observes, for example, or he tries

the action of element on element, matter on matter; he obtains a certain result; he knows both the facts,—both the preceding and the present condition or appearance of the substances,—but he is lost in the link between them. He knows, as facts, the operation and the result; he can tell you *what* has been and what is; but he could not tell previous to experiment, that that result would follow and no other, because he knew not *how* the substances were constituted in relation to each, or how they would be mutually affected by contact: he now can tell, since he has seen it, that in all similar cases, no other result will follow *but* that; yet still, he cannot tell *how* it is that it does so, because he cannot explain those secret and mysterious affinities, the actual existence, the activity, and the effects of which, are, as facts, substantiated by positive demonstration. The *mode* of the operation of matter on matter is just as inexplicable, as the mode of the operation of mind on mind; but evidence, plainly establishing the *fact* of either, is, of course, not to be resisted.

Such evidence we believe we have in support of the direct operation of the supreme, on created, intelligence; in other words, of the inspiration of the writers of the Old and New Testaments. That these men were distin-

guished by some peculiar intercourse with heaven, is a statement, for which a greater variety, and larger and stronger masses of proof, can be brought, than for any moral proposition whatever. Amid all the mystery in which the nature of this intercourse is involved, one thing seems sufficiently established; namely, that inspiration, whatever were its mode, did not act, nor was it necessary for it to act, upon the style and language of its subject. We can conceive that it might secure all its ends without affecting these; and that, in some respects, it was better it should do so. It operated on the mind of the writer; on the stamina of his thoughts; on the substance and character of his conceptions; infusing new ideas, or recalling those previously possessed: but, leaving the language, the vehicle of conveyance to others, to be such as the education and habits of the writer spontaneously supplied. Hence, the writings of prophets, evangelists and apostles, who *all* "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," present that variety of method, style, and illustration, which might be previously expected from the different character of the persons employed. And hence, too, it is reasonable to judge of the genuineness of any composition, attributed to a given writer, from its internal

resemblance to the undisputed productions of the same mind.

It may not be amiss, perhaps, farther to remark, though the observation is not necessary to our present argument, that the individual peculiarities of manner which distinguish the sacred penmen, considered in connexion with that perfect union of object, that inviolate consistency of principle and purpose, in which writers of all ranks and of every age so entirely coincide, furnishes an argument in support of that very inspiration, by which it might be imagined those peculiarities would themselves be destroyed. It seems to demand the agency of some one presiding intelligence, to preserve among so many persons so variously distinguished, and during such a series of changes and such a lapse of years, the perfect harmony for which their writings are remarkable. It seems to strike the mind, that such an effect must necessarily be referred to divine superintendence. Perhaps, too, it might not be deemed altogether fanciful to observe, that thus the whole volume of Revelation presents a sort of correspondence to that of the universe. When viewed as a whole, and when as such it is compared with the undoubted work of the Supreme Wisdom, the same agent appears—and appears the same in both. We find him

uniting similar great characteristics; exhibiting, in the moral discoveries of his will, a striking resemblance to that *unity* and *variety*, which so obviously pervade the economy of nature.

The application of most of these remarks to the present epistle is obvious. We have undisputed productions of the person to whom it is attributed, and we conceive that it is right to regard any striking instances of its resemblance to them, as a presumption, at least, of its Pauline origin, and its consequent apostolical authority. I would beg, however, further to observe, that even should the contrary opinion be established, the book would still be important in assisting our conceptions of the primitive faith. It certainly contains the most explicit and frequent statements—the most ample and extended illustrations of the priestly office, and the other mediatorial functions of the Redeemer of mankind. It exhibits the doctrine of acceptance through his sacrifice, and represents it as prefigured in the principal appointments of the Jewish ritual, with a force and distinctness which it is impossible to evade. Hence, indeed, it has generally been by those who reject these doctrines, that the genuineness of the epistle has been impugned. It has been said, that it constitutes their main support, and that if its authority were rejected, they must necessarily



fall from their undeserved elevation. To this it is sufficient to reply, that it does not constitute their *only* support ; they may be more largely argued and illustrated in it than in others, (for which very adequate reasons can be assigned,) but they are stated in others both with frequency and precision ; allusions, arguments, exhortations, commands, are also perpetually occurring, which suppose or involve them, and which thus afford that kind of indirect evidence, which, to some minds, is more satisfactory than explicit propositions. But, even allowing the book to be destitute of apostolical authority, there is a circumstance connected with it, which (they who reject it being judges) ought to impart to it considerable importance as an exposition of apostolical opinion. It is this. Whatever doubt may have been entertained of the author of the epistle, there never has been any respecting the period at which it was composed. It is universally admitted to be a production of the apostolic age. Hence, *whoever* wrote it, this inference still follows, that it shows in what way an intelligent believer, at that time, thought and reasoned, respecting the intimate connexion of the Gospel and the Law, the character and work of Messiah, the mysterious requisitions of Judaism, and the supposed interpretation of Christianity ; and even in this

lowest light, it is of inestimable value ; all probabilities are in favour of the correctness of the writer's hypothesis ; if uninspired authority is to have any weight, it must be more " rational " to attach importance to such an opinion, than to one subsequently formed, however " improved " it may seem to modern sagacity.

## II.

Advancing, however, from these introductory observations, and assuming the inspired character of the epistle, we proceed to the immediate object of discourse. The passages we are to investigate and explain, embrace a topic of unquestionable importance, and of acknowledged difficulty,—that faith, " without which it is impossible to please God." It is my design to attempt an illustration of the principle, as the source of all acceptable virtue, by a regular exposition of the whole of this chapter. Of course this will mostly consist of a view of its *effects*, as seen in the lives of " the cloud of witnesses," whom the Apostle celebrates as distinguished for its exercise. This design, however, with the motives that have induced it, we shall take a future opportunity more distinctly to explain. The present discourse will, therefore, be exclusively occupied

by a preliminary discussion, in which we shall endeavour to exhibit such a general view of the principle itself, as may be sufficient to prepare the way for our intended object, and may include an illustration of some points to which it will often be necessary afterwards to refer, and which, therefore, it may be an advantage first of all distinctly to establish.

What appears primarily to demand attention, is the first of the selected passages, which looks like a specific definition of faith. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." That this was intended by the Apostle to be a definition or description of *a* faith, is obvious. The question with theologians has been, of what kind? whether particular or general? that is, whether of the principle with which pardon is connected, and which is said to justify the sinner; or whether of that more comprehensive principle by which the saint "lives," which, in the hour of distress or temptation, assuages grief and invigorates virtue. The latter is the general opinion. It seems to be countenanced by the context. The Apostle, in the preceding chapter, addressing the Hebrews as believers, adverts to the afflictive circumstances in which they were involved; warns them against apostatizing; exhorts them to constancy; and reminds

them, by a scriptural quotation, that they were to “live by faith;” and then, intending largely to illustrate this truth, he gives, in passing onwards to the fulfilment of his purpose, a description of *that* faith which he intended, which he was anxious they should exercise, and the power of which he was about to exemplify.

It seems proper, therefore, to admit, that the definition of the Apostle is to be taken in its most comprehensive sense. It is to be observed, however, that, if the language defines what faith is *at all*, it may, perhaps, define what faith is *always*. That is to say, it may be, that faith, whensoever exercised, and whatsoever it may effect; whether it be that which a man exercises after he is a believer, and as such; or whether it be that by which he becomes so; it *may* be, that, in each case, it is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” The compass of the principle may be more or less extended; the objects may be more or less numerous; they may be different, or they may be the same viewed under different aspects, and for different purposes; but still, the principle, as such, may undergo no change;—as to its nature, it may still possess those properties, and those only, which are attributed to it in the text.

Perhaps, therefore, in strict accuracy of speech, there are not *kinds* of faith. The principle is probably one. For the sake of distinctness, we may speak of that which justifies, and that which sanctifies; that of the sinner, and that of the saint; but, it may be, that we speak all the time of a mental act really identical, only contemplated in different lights and relations; in the one case, as it has an aspect towards heaven, and in the other, towards earth; in the first, as it is viewed in itself by the Supreme Mind, and in the second, as it is seen by us in its effects. In short, if it can be so expressed without impropriety, we may be regarding, perhaps, the same thing, in the one case as it influences God, and in the other as it influences man.

We suspect that there is some truth in these suppositions. It will be our object to evince it in the succeeding remarks. Your attention will first be called to the language of the Apostle, as descriptive of faith in its most general and comprehensive sense; that sense, in which it directly bears on his present purpose, and in which we shall principally have to regard it in subsequent discourses.

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” The word rendered “substance,” seems, in its application

to objects that are desirable and expected, to express, such an entire confidence in their future actual possession, or, in the sufficiency of the means by which they are secured, as imparts to them, in relation to us, the character of present reality. That, translated "evidence," is a logical term signifying conclusive demonstration; it is here applied to things that are invisible, to matters that cannot be submitted to sense, and, it imports that the mind so feels the force of the proofs by which their existence is established, as to regard them with a sentiment similar to that, with which it looks upon actual appearances. Perhaps the brief phrases "confident expectation" and "perfect persuasion" may express every thing we are warranted to include in the two terms; every thing in fact intended to be conveyed by the sacred writer. It would then be said, "faith is the confident expectation of things hoped for, the perfect persuasion of things not seen." The Apostle, it will be observed, describes two classes of objects as coming within the sphere of the general principle, and *that* principle as supposing the existence of two corresponding mental states, or,—if you prefer it,—as comprehending the exercise of two appropriate mental emotions. The entire definition may be expressed, either by the two distinct parts

of which it consists being transposed, (a very allowable liberty by way of paraphrase,) or, by their being presented in the order that obtains in the text. The first we should term the order of nature, the second that of observation. Each would stand thus :—" Faith is the perfect persuasion of things not seen, [and] [connected with] [leading to] [terminating in] the confident expectation of things hoped for."—" Faith is the confident expectation of things hoped for, [and] [founded on] [arising from] the perfect persuasion of things not seen." In the first case, you observe, the objects are placed in the order in which they come to be perceived and felt by the mind ; and the states of mind are described as they are successively experienced. In the latter case, the process is reversed. It is conceived to be completed. You are supposed to look at it as such. It is therefore presented by describing the last result, and connecting it with that which necessarily precedes it, and without which it could not be.

Both parts of this definition we should conceive to be necessary to a scriptural description of faith, and both the mental exercises to belong to the nature of the thing ; and, in either case, no more. The description and the reality would thus equally be complete. In consistency with this remark, faith might, perhaps,

not improperly be denominated, the repose of the intellect and the repose of the affections; that is, the understanding perfectly admitting the divine testimony, and the heart confidently trusting the divine assurances. This, at least, is *that* faith "by which the elders obtained a good report." And it is that by which the Christian lives and acts, and "overcomes the world." Its sphere of observation is immense. It is commensurate with the whole compass of Revelation. It includes all objects divinely attested, for it embraces ALL the "sayings of God."

### III.

It will become us, however, more minutely to illustrate the text, by glancing at the principal particulars it may be considered to comprehend. Taking the parts of the definition in the order of nature, and directing our attention to the first, we may remark, that "faith," as the "perfect persuasion of things not seen," includes the admission of *three different classes of facts*.

The first class consists of actually existing spiritual facts. Such as, that there is a God; a supreme, infinite, eternal, holy Intelligence; perfect in all the attributes of his adorable



nature. That he governs the world; is no unconcerned spectator of the transactions of earth, but sustains certain important relations to it, and presides over the vast affairs of its moral history. Here let it be observed, that faith conceives of God, not as a discovery, but as a revelation; that is, not as an hypothesis demonstrated by reasoning, but as a truth established by testimony. It is not God, as what is termed Natural Religion describes him to be; but it is God, both as to manner of existence and actual character, as he himself says that he is. Again; that there is a heaven; the place of the visible manifestation of Deity; “the habitation of his holiness;” where he is revealed, in some ineffable manner, to the enraptured gaze of beatified immortals; the home alike of redeemed and unfallen natures; of those that have been ransomed from apostasy, and of those that are reaping the results of successful probation: where is the glorified person of Messiah, who is discharging certain specific offices connected with the enlargement and the sanctification of his church. That there is a hell; a place of unmingled evil, where no circumstance either arrests or alleviates the consequences of crime; where the natural connexion between departure from God and the infelicity of the creature is exhibited in the actual experience of condemned spirits—of angels

who kept not their first estate, and of men who neglected the means of mercy. All these are actually existing spiritual facts. They each have a positive reality at this moment. We could not discover them by reasoning. The existence of some we might conjecture, but of others we could know nothing. Of some, therefore, the existence, — and of all, the certainty and completeness, — are ascertained exclusively by testimony. Now faith, in relation to these, considered simply as invisible things thus substantiated, is, the impression of their reality upon the understanding, in consequence of the admission of the testimony by which it is asserted.

The second class consists of things equally unseen, but of a different nature; namely, past facts, which have taken place in connexion with the origin, or in the course of the history, of our world.

The propriety of specifying this class, will be instantly apparent, by adverting to the third and seventh verses of the present chapter. In the first of these, we are expressly referred to the creation, as a thing, which, by faith, we understand or admit. In the last, the very term employed in the definition of the principle, is used in relation to an object, not, like those of the former class, exclusively spiritual and now existing; but a physical though miraculous event, a

thing which occurred, had a beginning and an end, in time. "By faith Noah was warned of God of things not seen as yet." The deluge, (though the expression may refer to its being unprecedented, yet it still illustrates our present argument)—the deluge, previous to its actual occurrence, was to Noah "a thing not seen;" and to us, who did not witness its positive infliction, it is equally so. To the Patriarch and his children, though its possibility and certainty were at first admitted purely by faith, it afterwards became an object of sense; to us it never has been, and never can be that; it is "a thing not seen," established by testimony. In this way, the whole class of facts to which we refer, are correctly contemplated. It includes those already adverted to, namely, the origin and destruction of the primitive earth. "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God." By faith, also, we understand that "the world which once was, being overflowed with water, perished." It includes, too, the intervening events,—such as, the probation and apostasy of our first parents; its effects on the religion and the history of the species; and whatever is recorded of patriarchal transactions. Also, subsequent events,—such as, the extraordinary selection of an eminent individual, whose descendants were to be numerous and distin-

guished, and from among whom the promised Deliverer was to spring. The various circumstances connected with the character, the fortunes, and the favours conferred upon that singular people, preparatory to the coming of the Lord. All the facts involved in that stupendous event. His actual incarnation; his holy life; his numerous miracles; his sufferings and death; his resurrection; his ascension into heaven; and, in short, the whole *material* of the mediatorial economy. All these things had successively an existence in the history of our world, and, simply considered as facts, were known to certain portions of the species by the evidence of sense; but to *us* they are not thus known; they are "things not seen," and are with propriety included in the objects of faith. We believe them, not because we have "seen, heard, handled," in the primary acceptation of these terms; but because we receive the testimony which says, that "God in former times spake unto the fathers by the prophets;" that "in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son;" that "the eternal life" which was with the Father was revealed; that "this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world;" "was manifest in the flesh; justified in the Spirit; seen of angels; received up into glory."

The third class of things not seen, consists of future facts, considered simply as such; as anticipated occurrences, things that are *to be*, irrespective of their other relations. It includes, such as, that there is a state of consciousness to be entered upon at death; that there will be the resurrection of the dead; the ultimate judgment, and the irrevocable determination of the eternal destiny, of all moral and spiritual natures; that "the wicked will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord;" that there will be the creation, or something equivalent to the creation, of "new heavens and a new earth, wherein shall dwell righteousness;" into which the saved and sanctified by Jesus Christ shall be permitted to enter, and where, in his presence, and as his, they shall commence a career of boundless and beatific perfection.

These three classes of past, present, and future facts, are all comprehended in "the things not seen;" and the "perfect persuasion" that they are, were, and are to be, constitutes the first element in the complex principle denominated faith. In relation to these, it is the *eye* of the mind; it enables it, as it were, to realize, to perceive, to survey them; to regard spiritual and distant facts with the consciousness and conviction belonging to visible and present

subsistences. The principle is thus penetrating and powerful; and it expatiates, as you perceive, in consistency with our former remark, over a field of immense extent. Suffer me, however, to remind you, that this field, though immense, is limited; it is confined by the statements and the discoveries of the record; it embraces *all* that is there, but *nothing else*. The principle is not imagination giving substantial existence either to the probabilities or the fictions of philosophy—to the rational or the romantic speculations of intellect and genius, in their attempts to penetrate the spiritual state; to trace the moral history of the species; or, to conjecture its future consummation: but, it may be said to be imagination aiding the intellect in its simple reception of the divine testimony. Every human conceit is abandoned, but every “saying of God” is felt to contain a certainty and a fact; and faith, as the perfect persuasion of this, is, in the appropriate language of scripture, “*seeing* the things that are invisible.”

#### IV.

It is next to be considered, that in his description of faith, the apostle connects with this perfect persuasion of things not seen, “the

confident expectation of things hoped for." It is not enough, it seems, that the facts, as such, are admitted; that they are contemplated as existing realities, or as a series of events. This view can be taken of them by any mind, in any world, whatever its moral circumstances or character. Something more is requisite in man. They are to be viewed by him in their peculiar relation to humanity. He is to consider their adaptation to himself—the end they are designed to accomplish—the reason why to *him* they have been revealed. They are to be associated, therefore, with the gracious assurances, which are either expressed in words, and appended to their annunciation in the Record; or, which they themselves convey, by the language they utter to attentive reason. The moral meaning, in short, of "the things not seen" is to be interpreted, and to be succeeded by corresponding emotions; and this meaning will be found to be the promise of "good things to come," and therefore, of "things to be hoped for."

These things comprehend all that is necessary for the comfort and the virtue of a sinful intelligence, struggling through a state of trial and temptation. They include all that can be enjoyed on earth, and all that is expected in heaven: all that may be required by present ignorance, weakness and vicissitude; and all

that enters into the idea of ultimate perfection. It is unnecessary so formally to arrange, or so minutely to illustrate these particulars, as we arranged and illustrated those of the preceding division of the discourse. A very brief and general enumeration will suffice. "The things hoped for," may be said to be such as, the pardon of sin—the forgiveness of daily imperfection and infirmity. The influences of sanctifying grace. Spiritual strength to subdue tendencies and habits of evil. Light in studying the Scriptures. Wisdom to discover, and ability to obey the will of God. The divine presence in worship; the divine aid in temptation; the divine support in affliction and death. And, finally, the fulfilment of all that is included in that part of salvation which is "yet to be revealed,"—a glorious resurrection, a union with the whole of the redeemed church, the conscious attainment, and the everlasting security, of perfect virtue and perfect bliss.

Of these things, faith, it is said, is the "substance," the confident expectation. It views them not merely as realities, but as realities to be possessed; which are actually offered to the reception of man, and are secured to him by infallible promises, and adequate instrumentality. As with respect to the "things not seen," faith, we said, might be denominated the



*eye*—so, with respect to the “things hoped for,” it might be denominated the *hand*—of the mind. It is that by which it lays hold of, appropriates, apprehends them. It so implicitly receives the divine assurances, that it acts, as having the blessings to be possessed now, and certain of those to be possessed hereafter. It thus gives a present subsistence to the essence of future expectation, and extracts a sensible enjoyment, and imbibes a positive strength, from whatever is adapted to immediate necessity.

Now, my brethren, it was faith in this large and general sense,—faith, of this comprehensive grasp, steady maturity, and invincible robustness, that the apostle meant to describe in the first verse of the chapter. This is *that* faith “for which the elders obtained a good report;” for which they received, that is to say, the approving testimony of Jehovah; have since been celebrated in the church; and are presented as an example to successive generations. This principle was the very element of their spiritual existence. They lived by it. It was the means of all their religious and moral excellence; and hence, it is easy to understand, why the apostle urged its cultivation by the Hebrew believers, to secure their attachment to truth, and their perseverance in virtue. In future discourses it will be our business to illustrate the practical

power of the principle in specific instances—in individual character and particular effects : at present, we shall merely show, in a brief remark, how it comes to be in actual possession of this power ; and how he who lives habitually under its influence, *must* obtain a good report.

As “the persuasion of things not seen,” it supposes the mind to be perfectly submissive to the highest authority ; the reason implicitly acquiesces in all that is spoken from the throne ; hence, the elements of man’s religion, that is, all necessary knowledge respecting the Supreme Nature, the circumstances of humanity, the means of happiness, and so on—are established on a permanent basis, and thus, intellectual anxiety, scepticism and disquietude, terminate for ever. As such, too, it excites to the pursuit of excellence, by unveiling, as it were, the worlds that are not seen : it thus counteracts the incessant impressions of sensible objects ; it animates and directs, by discovering the mysteries of our spiritual nature ; it transforms into positive facts, the otherwise unsubstantiated truth, which has often been vaguely embodied in the dreams of superstition and the conjectures of philosophy ; in short, a field of vision is opened to the eye of the soul, replenished with all that can aggravate the desire of virtuous attainment. As “the expectation of things

hoped for," it tends to the very same result. It thus brings to our weak, sensitive, suffering nature, appropriate and requisite assistance—nutriment to support, and cordials to restore. It removes the pressure of guilt, and, by promoting peace between the soul and God, it gives new and irresistible motives to obedience; it makes obedience possible, by placing it on a new ground, and urging it for new purposes; all the feeling previously expended in distraction or despair, is purified and preserved, and bent with delighted intensity to the constant fulfilment of christian obligation. As such, too, it penetrates the perplexities of Providence; it confides, in spite of appearances, in superintending benevolence and rectitude; it anticipates the *result*, sees *that* to be good, though it cannot entirely comprehend the process; and thus, it both promotes the peace of the mind, and prompts the man to "maintain his integrity." As such, also, it realizes the "refuge and strength" which we have in God—the influences which are waiting to be ours at the moment of danger,—and by these, thus obtained, the believer's virtue is at once preserved and augmented. In short, it expects great things, and therefore, it both receives and performs them. The man who in this sense is "strong in faith," resolutely relying on the

promises of God, becomes, as it were, virtually invested with the divine attributes; they are exerted *for* him, and the effect, on certain occasions, is the same as if they were exerted *by* him. We wonder not that he should sustain or achieve what appears impossible, for a power is his, "both to will and to do," of divine operation and divine vigour. My brethren, this is the nature, and these are the effects of that faith of which we are to discourse; that, to which the elders owed all their moral superiority, and by which, in proportion as we possess it, we ourselves are to overcome the world. This is the secret of all the spiritual energy that has ever been exerted in the church. By this, believers, in every age, have wrestled with God, resisted temptation, sustained calamity, and triumphed in death. By this, they have seen what the natural man could not see; they have obtained what he could not possess; and thus, combining looking at the invisible, with laying hold of Almighty strength, they have been animated to deeds of illustrious virtue, and have "perfected" their faith by works;—by works, which nothing but this principle could suggest or produce; by works, the germ of which is as necessarily inherent in the principle, as light in the sun, or excellence in God.

## V.

So far, we have attempted an illustration of what may be termed the faith of the saint. We have explained the apostolic description of the general principle; we have shown the extensive sphere in which, as exercised by the believer, it moves and acts; and the admirable influence it is adapted to exert upon his personal virtue. We shall now advance to the illustration of another topic. It will be our object to show, that the very same description of the principle, as to its specific properties, may be applied to what we term the faith of the sinner—that is, of man as man, in first receiving the “knowledge of the truth that he may be saved.” In such a person, as has already been remarked, the sphere of the principle may be less extended, its objects may be fewer, they may be viewed in a different aspect and for different purposes, than when contemplated by the person otherwise denominated: but still, as a principle, his faith is the same; it includes both the elements ascribed to faith in the text; it is “the persuasion of things not seen, and the expectation of things hoped for.”

To evince, according to the language just employed, that *thus* “a man is to receive the

knowledge of the truth that he may be saved," we cannot do better perhaps than advert to the apostle's description of the way of salvation. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Here is a call to the exercise of justifying faith; a statement, to an ignorant and sinful man, of that "belief" by which he was to pass from a state of condemnation to one of acceptance. Let us see whether the properties obviously essential to *this* faith, be not precisely those which belong to *that* already illustrated.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." Now, this, you observe, previous to explanation, means nothing. You can attach to the words no definite sense, and therefore you have no clear conception of the mental exercise they seem to demand. It cannot be supposed that their intended import is, "admit the fact—believe that there has been such a person as Jesus Christ." This fact, indeed, *is* to be admitted; but, in itself, thus nakedly proposed, what connexion can it have with a man's being "*saved*?" You may have the most perfect persuasion, the most assured belief, of the fact, that "Jesus Christ lived," but this, of itself, can have no more influence upon your character and state, than a belief of the existence of any other person. Thus simply admitted, the truth has

no moral power, because it has no moral meaning; it reveals nothing to your moral nature; it involves nothing to impress your moral sentiments—to excite or direct your moral sensibility. In short, the belief of the thing “not seen,” is unconnected with the expectation of any thing “hoped for.” Advance a step farther. “Believe that Jesus Christ was crucified.” Here is another truth, another fact. Here is the introduction of an idea, which Christians are accustomed to regard as of preeminent importance. The circumstance of the peculiar death of the person spoken of in the passage, is added to the preceding proposition. But this, you will again observe, if it be unexplained, *means* nothing—nothing to *you*. To *you*, the crucifixion of the person denominated Jesus Christ, considered simply as a fact,—stated as such without any additional idea, is no more than the crucifixion of any other individual. The proposition “that Jesus Christ was crucified,” like the proposition “that Jesus Christ lived,” has in itself no moral significancy. Again, therefore, nothing is revealed to your moral nature. Nothing is made known that can be supposed to have an influence on a man’s being “saved.” And this for the same reason, because the thing “not seen” is unconnected with anything “hoped for.” Advance farther—far as it is possible to

proceed. Let the apostolic direction be explained in all its extent. Let the divine dignity of the Lord be stated; his appearance, and the purpose of his appearance, "in the likeness of sinful flesh;" his holy life; his vicarious sufferings; his atonement and sacrifice; his resurrection from the dead; and his advocacy in heaven: let these be presented, and it is instantly perceived, that there is in all this, a voice and language which cannot but be heard. There is a revelation here to our nature and feelings—to the moral, as well as the intellectual man. The knowledge, indeed, first imparted, is that of the simple *facts* connected with the person and work of "the Lord;" but these come inscribed with intelligible characters, that impart the knowledge of *other* truths—of events and declarations infinitely momentous. They speak of the divine nature and government; the condition of humanity; the evil of sin; the mode of propitiation; the offer of forgiveness, and so on: they thus reveal the positive promise of pardon—the actual readiness of God to justify the guilty, and the sufficiency of the ground on which it may proceed. Now, justifying faith is the reception of *this* testimony—this testimony of the facts themselves, as well as of that substantiating their existence. But, this latter testimony all converges to one point, and



that is, just the gracious declaration of "things that are hoped for." He that receives "the truth," receives the whole impression of the combined evidence of these two witnesses. He admits the statements of the one; he confides in the assurances of the other; "peace in believing," is the result of the sentiment, produced and sustained by the union of both. "He that cometh unto God"—cometh as a sinner—cometh first of all for pardon and acceptance—"must believe," not only "that he *is*," ("a thing not seen,") but, also, that, in the way he hath appointed, "he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him;" ("a thing that is hoped for.")

It is the union of these convictions, or, in other words, the possession of both the elements of the complex principle, that constitutes that faith, which is at once the repose of the intellect and the repose of the affections. By this, the mind gazes on the invisible with perfect persuasion—it grasps the promised with implicit dependence. It feels assured not only that God is, or that God has spoken, but that *what* he has spoken he is able to perform. It confides in the adequacy of the medium, whose intervention affords to God, as a righteous governor, the possibility of acting as a compassionate prince. It reposes here. It embraces, pleads,

presents it. It thus directs, so to speak, the eye of Deity from the sinner himself, to *Him* in whom he is ever well pleased, and in whom therefore is ever beheld a sufficient reason for the exercise of mercy. That reason prevails. The faith is efficient on account of its object. For the sake of *that* the man is pardoned, *by means* of "the belief of the truth;"—the reception of it, "not in word, but in power;"—that is, the reception, not merely of the testimony of the letter, revealing "the things not seen;" but of the testimony of the things themselves, revealing others "to be hoped for." Thus, by the exercise of both the mental emotions involved in the apostle's definition of faith, the sinner admits the truth involved in his description of the way of salvation. "He believes in the Lord Jesus Christ," and,—*"he is saved."*

We have spoken, for the sake of popular apprehension, of the faith of the sinner and the faith of the saint; that, by which justification is secured; and that, which produces sanctified excellence. We have spoken as of two faiths of two persons; but you have seen that faith, as to its nature,—as to that which makes it *faith*,—is the same in both. In fact, it is one principle and one person. The words "saint" and "sinner," describe not two persons, but *one* viewed under two different aspects of moral

character, or two different moral relations to God. The faith of the saint and the faith of the sinner are not two faiths, but one—one specific principle, consisting of the same properties, but differing from itself in the extent of its observation and the quality of its effects. This idea, though in substance it has already been fully represented, you must permit me, for a moment, more explicitly to expand and illustrate.

The religion of the Bible is the religion of a sinner. The book comes to man first of all *as such*. Its *immediate* object is not the regulation of conduct, the formation of character, the production of practical excellence, and so on; this, indeed, is its grand and ultimate aim, the end it incessantly pursues, and without accomplishing which it accomplishes nothing: but, we repeat, its first, immediate, direct object, is not this; *that* is the pardon of the guilty, their reconciliation to God,—then comes the regulation of external behaviour, the promotion of that holiness “which becometh saints.” Now, both these objects are secured, instrumentally, by the same process,—the cordial reception of the divine testimony. That testimony is universally resolvable, into the attestation of matters of fact, with, or containing, the promulgation of matters of promise. Every thing addressed

either to saint or sinner involves these ; and the cordial reception, by each, of testimony so similar in its properties, supposes impressions, identical in kind, to be made on both. First of all, in the man as a sinner, faith, or the reception of the divine testimony, must, as we have seen, have a regard to all that it is to him, both as to substance and significancy, fact and assurance. It is the appropriate impression of the whole truth upon the whole mind. It includes, therefore, both persuasion of the fact and confidence in the promise. By such a “belief of the truth” he becomes “an heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” His moral relation to God is changed. Trusting in, and accepted through, “the beloved,” he is no longer “a child of wrath,” but a pardoned or justified person. Then, from this point he is to advance ; he is now, as a saint, to “live” by faith, and “to perfect holiness in the fear of God.” But, however far he may advance as such, *that* faith by which he does so, is still simply the appropriate impression upon him of the divine testimony, — testimony, the objects of which are resolvable into facts and assurances. Still farther. In each case, the effects, though different, are appropriate ; and the point and range of observation are adapted to the immediate necessity. The man’s views might at first be

limited to what directly and essentially regarded his actual acceptance; every thing might be contemplated in exclusive relation to that, then, paramount object. But, since then, he has both enlarged his sphere and changed his ground of observation. He has added to those first and fundamental particulars all that gives fulness and proportion to his *knowledge* of the truth; and every thing has subsequently been contemplated in direct relation to character and duty. This, however, is just the operation of the same elements of persuasion and confidence in which the reception of the truth primarily consisted. The testimony as to *its* properties remains the same, so do the properties of its impression on the mind. Thus faith, the instrumental means of pardon to the sinner and purity in the saint; is *one*, as to its specific characteristics, in *both*. Whatever it may effect, immediately or remotely—immediately as to state, remotely as to character—it never is, and never can be, in itself, any thing but what the nature of the testimony and the nature of man render it at first. Whatever it is then, it continues; and whatever it is afterwards, it is then. “Faith,” *all* faith, “is the perfect persuasion of things not seen, *and* the confident expectation of things hoped for.”

## VII.

The two faiths, of the sinner and the saint, are thus seen, as to their nature, to be resolvable into one. It is now further to be observed, that the two parts of which they, or rather *it*, is said to consist, are also resolvable into one—that is, into the mere belief or reception of testimony. We have spoken of faith as a principle, as an act or exercise of the mind, and so on; but, in strict accuracy of speech, it is neither more nor less than this—the belief of what is testified. It is the mind itself receiving an appropriate impression from what is presented to it, and it is nothing more. With respect to its double aspect, as defined by the apostle, it may be explained in two ways. *First*, The one may be contemplated as the *effect* of the other, but as so necessarily an effect, that it is spoken of as a part of it, as a constituent element, entering into its very essence. Hence, what, metaphysically speaking, should be regarded as the immediate result of belief, would, popularly speaking, be said to belong to the nature of the thing. Or, *secondly*, it may be put thus. The testimony which reveals “a thing not seen,” is received, if that thing be realized, as a positive reality; but the testimony which reveals “a thing to be hoped for,” is *not*

received if that thing be realized only to the same extent — only as “a thing not seen,” and no farther. The *things* are different; they each sustain their respective relation towards the mind, and the belief of each is the mind bearing its correspondent relation towards them. But this is *not* the case, if the impression made by both be the same. If, however, this impression be different and appropriate, then it *is* the case; that is to say, the testimony, asserting the things to be what they are, is really received, because, the “thing hoped for,” has a sentiment associated with it, distinct from that associated with the “thing not seen.” Faith, however, is not, properly speaking, a different act in the two cases. In both it is the reception of testimony. The difference is not so much in the *kind* of reception as in the thing testified; not in the mode, but in the objects of belief. We are to look at what is actually presented to the mind, and we shall discover, perhaps, that faith, in all cases, is believing this *to be what it is*.

To this it might be objected, that there are certain minds in the universe, who have a perfect persuasion not only of the facts, but of the *meaning* of the facts, which constitute the system of mercy, and yet who believe not,—who have no faith. It may be said that angels, both

fallen and unfallen, are acquainted not only with the substance, but with the significance of the plan of salvation; that they have an entire conviction of what we should term the things not seen; that, moreover, they understand all they teach, and have a clear perception of the promises they involve, but that, still, they receive no correspondent impression from these, and therefore, that, in consistency with the view given above, it should be denied that they know them *as what they are*.

The objection is more apparent than real. They *do* know them as what they are—promises of mercy to man; but this is not what they are to *them*; what they are to them, however, is the testimony *they* are to receive; belief is the reception of that testimony addressed to each class of beings respectively, and not of that which is addressed only to one; this, we have no doubt, they *do* receive; and, therefore, in the proper sense of the word, they have faith—they believe the gospel. This belief, too, is capable of being defined in a way which shall include what, in one sense, would be called, either the immediate *effect* of belief, or, the sensitive part of the process, in man; but which, strictly speaking, is belief itself, for it is the appropriate impression upon the mind of what is actually presented to it.



To see this, just observe what it *is* that is presented by the gospel to three different minds taken from the three classes of beings adverted to, — a man, an unfallen, and a fallen intelligence. All look, let us say, upon the very same transactions, and all read the very same revelation they involve of the divine character; but, how different an object is that same revelation of the divine character in relation to each! how different, therefore, the object actually presented to each, the appropriate impression of which on their separate natures, is to constitute, respectively, their belief of the gospel! To the first, or human intelligence, it is the promise and provision of mercy for *himself*, revealing God in such an aspect as to excite delighted expectation. To the second and third, it is the promise and provision of mercy for *another*, revealing God in such an aspect as to excite, in the second, ecstatic adoration, and, in the third, exasperated terror. Hence, in the man, faith—is the perfect persuasion of what is true, and the confident expectation of what is promised. In the unfallen intelligence, faith—is the perfect persuasion of what is true, and the vivid realization of what is pleasurable. In the fallen intelligence, faith—is the perfect persuasion of what is true, and the vivid realization of what is terrific. All

have faith of the same kind, because faith, as faith, is, in all intelligent natures, the same thing. It is the appropriate impression or reception of testimony. But, the testimony really addressed to each of these beings is different; and therefore, just *because* faith in itself is the same thing, is a different impression produced upon each.

But sometimes, you will say, there is a distinction spoken of between belief and faith. True. And, to see whether it can be reconciled to this simple view we are now taking of the subject, let us look at it. It may be put thus. I believe a *fact*; I have faith in *character*. I call that belief, which realizes the existence of a thing; I call that faith, trust, confidence, which reposes in the promise of an intelligent agent. Or, I believe that which *is*, I believe *in* that which says another thing *shall be*. If a fact is presented to me simply as such, I believe it; but if it be presented as a mean to a further end, I exercise faith by relying upon it as sufficient to secure that end. All this, however, amounts to nothing more than what we have stated faith to be—the appropriate impression on the mind of what is presented to it. There is here, in each case, nothing but the reception of testimony; only, there are, so to speak, two testimonies,—the

less and the greater, the simple and the complex ; each produces its correspondent impression, and if it were not so, each would not, properly speaking, be believed. There may be a different feeling in the mind towards a fact, and towards character ; or towards a fact regarded simply as such, and towards a fact regarded as an instrument : but still, this is just the mind sustaining its proper relation towards what is testified. There is no difference in the nature of our belief as the reception of testimony, the difference is in the nature of the thing believed.

How is it then, you may further ask, that a man is often said to believe, and yet not to have faith ? How is it that we hear of persons giving an assent to the truth of the gospel, and systematically understanding it, and yet being evidently destitute of faith ? I should think this language might be called popular, but not precise ; it is not what we term metaphysically just. To say that we may believe without having faith, is to say that we may believe without believing, which is absurd. It is true, the Scriptures themselves speak of the gospel coming in word only, not in power ; it is true, they record certain cases of persons said to have believed, who, yet, at the same time, are represented as neither saved nor sanctified,

and who, therefore, could not have that faith which is connected either with sanctity or salvation. Still, however, I suspect, the explanation is to be found, not in the different nature of the reception, or the different impressions, or different feelings, produced by the same thing; but, in the different nature of the object contemplated, or the different kind of testimony which is actually received. He who receives the gospel in word, and he who receives it in power, equally receive an appropriate impression from the object contemplated. Belief, as to its nature, is the same in both, but the testimony admitted is not. The one believes the proposition "the gospel is true;" the other believes the propositions of the gospel itself. The one admits the testimony of the letter, or of the men who assert that such and such facts constitute the gospel; the other believes the testimony of the Spirit, or of God speaking in the facts themselves. By the one, this latter testimony is realized only as a *thing*, not as testimony actually addressed to him; by the other it *is* thus realized—realized in relation to himself—and this changes its nature entirely. Both, therefore, have faith, in the true meaning of the term, as the reception of what is really before the mind; but that which *is* so, is infinitely different in each; and hence the difference

in their character and state. The one does not believe without faith, and the other has belief and faith too : but, the one believes that, which, in itself, has no power to save or sanctify ; the other believes that which *has* the power and exerts it upon him.

Hence, instead of saying that there may be belief without faith, it would seem to be less inaccurate to say, that there may be the belief of a certain truth, without being the belief of *the* truth. There may be the impression or reception of a certain testimony relative to the gospel, without the impression or reception of the gospel itself. The testimony really received, has its proper effect, but it is not *that* testimony which ought to be received. Hence, such persons, properly speaking, have no belief at all. Not because they believe nothing, but because they believe not *that* which God intended they should. Apply this to the scriptural instances lately alluded to. There are some who are said to have “believed” in Christ, but to whom he would not commit himself, because he knew what was in men. Doubtless, they believed something ; they believed some truth respecting him, but they did not believe *the* truth ; therefore, they were regarded and treated as not believing at all. So of the Jews, who were repeatedly charged by Jesus, with not believing

Moses, though, at the very time, they were strenuous in asserting the fact of his divine mission, the fact of the truth of his writings, or that "God spake by him." Jesus does not say, "you believe, but you have not faith;" but he says, "the object of your belief is imperfect,—the testimony really addressed to you is not received,—you believe that God spake by Moses, but you do not believe *what God spake*,—therefore, you do not believe at all." There was in these persons an entire absence of those feelings and sentiments, which the spirit of Moses' testimony, or the testimony of the Spirit through him, would have produced, had it been believed; and which, however (in one sense) they might have been represented as the *effect* of that belief, would just have really constituted the belief itself, as they would have been nothing but the appropriate impression of the testimony on the mind. So with respect to the brethren of "the rich man." I dare say they fully admitted the truth of the proposition, that "Moses and the prophets were inspired persons, and that their writings contained the sayings of God." But, this was not receiving the testimony of the writings themselves; and hence, Abraham speaks of them as if they neither believed the prophets nor Moses. They would have repelled the

charge of infidelity; they regarded themselves, no doubt, as most firm and decided believers in Judaism; yet, they did not believe *that* which would produce penitence and issue in pardon, and therefore they did not believe *at all*. They believed a certain truth, but not *the* truth. Abraham does not say they believe but have no faith—they give an intellectual assent to the truth, but not a sensitive, heartfelt reliance; but he insinuates that the truth itself—the testimony, and the object of the testimony, which was designed to produce a spiritual impression, was utterly *disbelieved*; so that, strictly speaking, what they wanted was a proper object of faith, rather than a proper faith or one of the parts of it.

We are thus brought by a different and, apparently, contradictory course of remark, to virtually the same conclusion with which we terminated a former series of illustrations. "Faith," *all* faith, "is the simple reception of testimony, *according to its nature*." According to its nature, it produces, by a necessary law, a corresponding impression on the mind. This impression, though spoken of as the effect of its reception, or as a second element essential to its completeness, *is* its reception, for, it is that, which, if not felt, the testimony is not received. The Gospel is the testimony of

God conveying assurances of good through the medium of intelligible facts. Therefore, the impression of that testimony, or, the belief or faith of those who receive it, is, “the confident expectation of things hoped for, arising from the perfect persuasion of things not seen.”

Here we shall terminate this, I greatly fear, too protracted discourse. It entered into my original design, to append to these remarks, the exhibition of certain great general conclusions to which they necessarily lead, respecting the proper evidence of faith—the impossibility of justification *but* by faith—the nature of hope and assurance as implied, in *some* sense, in faith—the necessity of our attention being directed to the proper *object* of faith, to truth, to *the* truth, as the only way to receive its corresponding impression, and to enjoy its healing and happy influences: and hence—the reasonableness of suspecting, that, the infelicity, and what is termed the “unbelief,” of believers, is owing, in general, to imperfect, obscure, and perplexed conceptions of truth; or, which is the same thing, to their not looking at it, or at what it is to *them*, but either to something which it is *not*, or which is not *truth*. Into these, however, and other kindred matters, we cannot at present enter.



Some of them may, probably, come to be embodied in subsequent discourses. But, if not, it is hardly too much to say, that you can yourselves very easily pursue the principles we have advanced, in all their bearings, upon these topics. In future we shall be principally employed in illustrating the practical power of faith, as seen in specific instances of active or enduring virtue—in individual character and positive achievement. The explanation we have attempted of the general subject, and of certain terms and phrases which may frequently occur, will enable you to enter into future illustrations, whether the language, in relation to the principle, happen to be the philosophic or the popular. Brethren, what we have advanced, illustrative of this important subject, has been, I am sensible, feeble and imperfect. But it is that “whereunto I have attained,” according to present knowledge and judgment, and *more* I could not accomplish. I think I perceive myself the justness of the positions I have been trying to establish, but I am not certain that I have succeeded in making them quite so obvious to you. I desire to commend both you and myself to the divine benediction and the divine guidance. May that Spirit, who is promised to the church, be copiously and constantly imparted to both, to

correct and enlarge our conceptions of his own truth—to bestow upon us the docility, and to enrich us with the rewards, of the humble disciple. Impressed with the magnitude of the task I have undertaken, I would humbly solicit your supplications on my behalf: and, if it be not improper or presumptuous, I would desire now to address the Everlasting Source of light and wisdom,—that Being, who himself gave his approving testimony to the men whose characters we are called to contemplate,—and I would address Him in language powerfully expressive, at once, of the necessities of the preacher and the majesty of his theme.

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“What in me is *dark*,  
Illumine. What is *low*, raise and support,  
That to the height of this great argument  
I may assert ETERNAL PROVIDENCE,  
And justify the ways of God to man.”

## SERMON II.

THE FAITH OF ABEL.

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HEB. XI. 4.

*By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts : and by it, he, being dead, yet speaketh.*

WE proceed, my brethren, to the fulfilment of the purpose intimated last Sabbath, of inviting your attention to a series of discourses on this chapter;—discourses, which shall exhibit a variety of illustrations of the power of that faith, which consists in “the perfect persuasion of things not seen, the confident expectation of things hoped for.” “This is the weapon that overcometh the world.” This is the source of courage, and the principle of perseverance. In all ages, and under each dispensation, the secret has been the same, by which holy men have learned to bear calamity without complaint, and

to meet temptation with vigorous resistance. In this chapter the apostle has presented to the contemplation of the church, what he terms a "cloud of witnesses" to the truth of this remark. The catalogue is embellished by names that will be held in everlasting remembrance. The study of it will continue to be, as it has ever been, a source at once of courage and consolation, to such as are struggling to be followers of them, "who through faith and patience are inheriting the promises." We propose, then, my brethren, to bring before you, in regular succession, the principal persons included in this catalogue; and to notice the events in their history, and the features of their characters, which tend to illustrate the exercise of their faith. Before, however, directly proceeding with this design, permit me to mention one or two of those considerations, which have had the greatest influence in inducing its formation.

1. The first is, that this species of instruction appears eminently adapted to excite interest, and secure attention. It will be very different from that which it is often our duty to employ. Many of the principles of our Faith are invested with a mysterious sublimity, which renders it difficult, if not impossible, adequately to apprehend or clearly to describe them. It becomes

us, indeed, to bring them before you, although in doing so, we feel like men looking at the sun. In expounding, also, various passages of scripture, we are compelled to proceed through involved processes of thought, which it is not always easy to simplify. But the exposition of character—the detail of fact and narrative—the observation of Providence—and the practical application of all to our personal situation—will at once be interesting to the educated and easy to the unlearned. An interest, too, may be created by collateral subjects, which the projected course will probably embrace; by our glances, for example, at the moral and religious history of the world;—the history, in fact, of man as a religious being; the moral vicissitudes through which he has passed, or is passing; the knowledge communicated, in different ages, of his situation and duty; and the manner in which individuals or societies neglected or improved it. There will be something interesting, it may reasonably be presumed, in these and similar topics, so necessary to just conceptions of the species and the world to which we belong. Between interest and improvement there is an unquestionable connexion;—a connexion which, to a certain degree, cannot be forgotten without folly, and is never *entirely neglected* without guilt.

2. A second inducement may be embodied in the proverbial expression that "example is better than precept." We are more likely to be successful in our inculcation of duty, if we not only state what it is right to do, but actually show how it has been done. The mind, in such cases, seems to have the advantage of another sense. It not only hears, but it sees. The understanding is not only put in possession of truth, but the fancy is furnished with illustrations and images. Many a man who could not comprehend the arguments for a particular Providence, can feel the proof, as seen in the lives of Abraham or Joseph. He, whose weakness would be overcome by temptation or calamity, could he remember nothing but the abstract precepts of the preacher, may be stimulated to exert both firmness and faith, by knowing that others have been equally tempted without sacrificing their virtue, and equally afflicted without losing their confidence. For this very purpose, we imagine, has the Holy Spirit included so much of an historical nature in the inspired volume. On the same account our divine Lord conveyed most of his instruction in parables, embodying, in the intelligible actions of men, the particular truth he intended to enforce. This was emphatically "teaching the multitude." The mass of mankind feel, rather than

reason. They arrive at truth by sensation, rather than by argument. The voice of nature from within, responds to the impressions of nature from without. They cannot go along with you, perhaps, in your demonstration of a principle; but they *can* comprehend the principle itself. They can learn nothing from a laboured disquisition on the beauty of virtue; but they can both see its beauty and feel its attractions, if presented before them in action and character. Now, by becoming familiar with the history of holy men, you will become familiar with the principles of religion itself; for it is *these*, in fact, you are required to contemplate, embodied in obvious and striking illustrations.

3. A third consideration arises from the vast importance of the principle for which these ancient believers are celebrated. When the situation and prospects of humanity are accurately understood, it ceases to surprise us, that the Scriptures should speak so strongly of faith. It ceases to be wonderful that ministers should mention it so much; we *rather* wonder that they mention it no more. Virtue, properly so called, seems impossible upon any other principle. Virtue,—meaning by the term, moral, resulting from religious, excellence;—character, internal and external, corresponding with *all*



our relations to *all* being. Of many of these relations we can know nothing but by testimony; the most important we are in danger of practically neglecting, unless we "set" that testimony "always before us." In the mind of creatures subject to death, religion would seem to imply, not only the knowledge of the divine existence, but the expectation of a future world. But *this* who shall *discover*? By whose penetration shall it be certainly ascertained? Its actual existence, — its specific properties, — its relation to the present condition of our being, — the means of making our state in it felicitous, should that not be a necessary and universal result; — these, and other kindred and important particulars, can be satisfactorily established only by testimony; and that testimony must be believed, — firmly, cordially, constantly believed; felt, as an ever present and ever pressing obligation; all its subjects seen as in vivid reality, and itself invested with the character of law. Considering our nature in its sublimest aspect — in its moral relations to eternity and God — there is no other conceivable principle by which any thing like excellence can be acquired or maintained. To "live," to "walk," to "fight" "by faith," are thus not more the demands of religion than the requisitions of philosophy. From this view of the importance of the prin-



ciple, as the grand promoter of that virtue which consists in persevering practical godliness,—the only virtue worthy the pursuit of immortal natures,—we see a reason sufficiently powerful to prompt the prosecution of our present purpose.

4. Lastly, other inducements arise from the variety of circumstance which the lives of so many persons necessarily include; hence, the different aspects and operations which this will present to us, of the general principle common to them all. Here are persons of different professions and pursuits—of all orders of society—of various ages—and many the subject of singular vicissitude. There are few temptations to crime—few opportunities for splendid virtue—few calamities to which we are exposed—and few ways in which life can terminate—but what may be paralleled in the history and death of these extraordinary men. There can be none, therefore, in however large or mixed a congregation, but may here find something directly adapted to their character and state. Whatever be the particular form which the common depravity may, in any of you, assume; whatever the kind of temptation most habitual or virulent; whatever the arduousness of the labour which Providence imposes—or the gloom of the way in which you are to walk—or even

the softnesses by which you are in danger of being lulled into security;—here, in the history of men “of like passions with yourselves,” who inherited the same nature and served the same God, you will find something written as if expressly for “*your learning*,” that *you*, “through patience and comfort of the scripture, might have hope.” This prospect of contributing, in some measure, to the benefit of all, by one or other of the names to which we must refer, as it is the great end of pulpit instruction in general, so it is the greatest inducement to that particular mode of it, which, for a season, we design to adopt.

## II.

The first name is that of Abel. He is contrasted with his brother, who has acquired, in the history of the species, unenviable distinction. “*By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it, he, being dead, yet speaketh.*”

We shall endeavour, in the first place, to explain in what Abel’s faith consisted, and how it was expressed; adverting, of course, to the inferiority ascribed both to Cain and his offering. We shall then found upon the facts of the

history such general reflections as they may seem naturally to suggest.

“By faith,” says the apostle, in the preceding verse, “we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God.” That is to say, by receiving the Divine Record as infallibly true, we arrive at the knowledge of a fact, which we could not, with such absolute certainty, have known without it. We know that this great and splendid universe was brought into existence by the *fiat* of that Being whom we denominate God: that Being who *was*, before any part of space glowed with the effulgence of suns and of systems; and who *will be*, after the glory of them all shall have passed away. By faith we believe what he has said respecting the absolute nature of the act of creation; we believe that “the things which are seen were not made of things which do appear;” that he not only operated on pre-existing materials, but that he called from nothing these materials themselves, giving them being, as well as form and order. From the same authority upon which we receive this fact, we receive other facts, connected not only with the creation of the world, but with the history of man. These facts we never could have known unless they had been told us. We may construct a system of opinions by the indepen-

dent exertion of our own minds; we may reason upon appearances and arrive at conclusions, without being indebted to foreign assistance; but, by *reasoning* we never could discover past facts; in this way no man could ever write a history; he who professes to inform us of what formerly occurred, must tell us either what he has heard, or what he has seen, but he must not tell us merely what he thinks. Applying these intuitive and unquestionable principles to the present subject, we observe, that, though we may reason, and reason plausibly, respecting the manner of the creation of the world, or the original circumstances and condition of mankind; yet, it is utterly impossible in this way to discover any thing respecting the *facts*. For the facts, we must necessarily be indebted to foreign information. This information we have in the Bible. Limited as it is, we are content to receive it not only as the most probable, but actually as the true interpretation of all natural and moral appearances. At times, perhaps, we may wish it had been more circumstantial or more extended; we may think it would have gratified us, to have known something more specific of the capacities and character of the first man: but, whatever we may wish, we have no right either to reject or to alter what *is* written respecting him; to call that a figure

which the historian gives as a fact; or to receive with hesitation the little that is said, because we cannot obtain all we should like. By faith, then, in the word of God, we believe, that, after he had finished the erection and embellishment of the material world—after he had combined its elements and fixed its proportions—after he had separated the earth and sea—after he had covered one with the luxuriance of vegetable nature, and filled both with varieties of sensitive existence—after he had replenished every part of his domain with forms of beauty, and surveyed the whole with complacent satisfaction,—we believe, that he created a being to be “lord of all;” one, who represented upon earth the moral majesty of his own nature; who was distinguished by intelligence, and designed for virtue: but, who was to be tried by a test at once simple and sufficient; by which trial, he was to undergo a proof as to the strength of his principle—to afford a pledge of subsequent obedience—to secure the perpetuity of his primeval advantages, or, by contracting guilt, to forfeit them for ever!

On the same authority that we believe Adam was tried, we believe that he fell; that he submitted to the first temptation; that, in consequence of this, instead of remaining immortal, he became subject to death; instead of ad-



vancing, as we may reasonably suppose he would have done, from "glory to glory," he lost the moral lustre with which he was originally invested; his heart became the seat of turbulent passions,—his intellect of error,—his mind of remorse. A catastrophe occurred in which all nature sympathised, and in the effects of which his posterity were involved. A poison was infused into our moral constitution, which still continues to corrupt it; the disastrous consequences of which were dreadfully displayed, in the very first child that sprung from the primitive transgressor. The heavens, we are informed, were shrouded in sackcloth when the Saviour of men suffered; the sun shrunk from the spectacle of innocence in agony; he could not look upon the act by which man filled up the measure of his guilt. We can almost imagine that similar prodigies accompanied the commencement of man's disobedience; that the same sun expressed his abhorrence of the crime, by eclipsing his splendour and withdrawing from the sight; that with reluctance he returned back again to illuminate a fallen world,—a world which his beams could never reach without contact with pollution,—where his light would be given to lead man to the grave, to show him his misery, and to shine upon his ashes.

By the circumstance of the apostasy, the

religion of the species was entirely changed. While in Paradise, it was the direct and simple effusion of gratitude, arising from the bosom of innocent intelligence. It was the instinctive exertion of unimpaired intellect, and the spontaneous effort of holy feeling, employed in the contemplation and devoted to the service of the Supreme Nature. There was no barrier then between earth and heaven. There was no interposing obstruction between man and God. There was no darkness investing the Divinity, to excite in his creatures perplexity and terror. *He* could feel no fear whose bosom was burdened with no guilt. And while God saw upon his works the same loveliness as when he pronounced them "good," he had no reason to withdraw his complacency, or to retire into the depths of his everlasting dwelling-place. As soon, however, as humanity had sinned, and the ratification of its punishment was pronounced, this seems to have been demanded by the majesty of the Eternal. He established, indeed, a covenant of grace, but then he withdrew in a manner from the scene of pollution, and enclosed himself within the precincts of that unseen world, "where nothing that defileth" is permitted to approach. It comported not with the dignity of the Supreme, to maintain as before familiar intercourse, or even to treat

*directly* with the apostate. Henceforth, he was commanded to come with the significant expressions of extrinsic dependence. His religion became completely altered from what it was at first. It consisted of other acts and other feelings. Instead of being nothing more than the simple gratitude of innocence, and the glowing adoration of virtue, it was the service of a creature conscious of crime, exposed to punishment, pleading for forgiveness, confiding in mercy, and saved by mediation.

These general remarks will enable us to understand the different character of the two persons who are this morning introduced to our attention;—persons, who might almost be described as the first martyr and the first infidel. “Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain;” and he did this, it is said, “by faith.” There was something more in his sacrifice, and something more in himself, which secured the gracious acceptance of his person and worship. The want of these in his brother’s occasioned his rejection. The only explanation that can be given of this subject, consistently with enlightened reason, may be comprehended in the following observations, in which we shall remark, *first*, that there was a difference in the *sacrifices*, and, *secondly*, a difference in the *sentiments*, of the two worshippers.



1. "Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice." Or simply, "more sacrifice,"—or a "fuller," a "more complete sacrifice." It is supposed to refer not only to intrinsic excellence, but to quantity and number. In consistency with this, the original history might be paraphrased in this way,—“Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord; and Abel—he did the same,—*he* brought of the fruit of the ground; but he did more than this, he *also* brought of the firstlings of his flock.” The word “also” being conceived to signify “in addition,” and not merely “in like manner.” Both presented a meat or thank offering; but one of them presented a sin offering besides. Both presented an “offering,” but not a “sacrifice;” for, properly speaking, the fruits of the earth were not such;—they were not a victim, not a thing *slain*. This, however, was *added* by Abel, and hence the greater completeness of *his* presentation.

But, supposing that the “offering” be regarded as *involved* in the “firstling” of Abel, it still remains to be accounted for, how he came to present a “sacrifice” at all. Does it seem to you a natural suggestion for man to come to God by an act of cruelty and blood?—by the infliction of pain and the extinction of enjoyment? Do you think it probable, that Abel,

of his own accord, would have conceived the idea of inflicting death as an acceptable service to that very Being who had seemed so anxious to exclude death from his dominions? I should think not. Indeed we cannot suppose that God would leave such a matter as the way in which he would be worshipped, to be determined by an ignorant and erring worshipper. It seems by far the most rational supposition, that we have here a proof of the divine appointment of sacrifice. And if sacrifice was divinely appointed, then it was appointed for man *as man*—that is, for *all* men, whatever their occupation or pursuits; not merely for keepers of sheep, but for tillers of the ground; for men as *sinner*s, altogether irrespective of professional distinctions. The institution had an equal reference to the condition of the species and the “Lamb of God;” to him, who, though he did not appear till the “fulness of time,” was thus virtually “slain from the foundation of the world.” “Without shedding of blood there is no remission.” There never has been, and there never could be. The whole of both Covenants goes to corroborate and confirm the assertion. “It *became* God, in bringing sons unto glory, to make the Captain of salvation perfect through sufferings.” “It *behoved* Christ to suffer.” “If Law *could* have given life, verily righteousness

would have been by law." There was a mysterious and invincible necessity for some other process. This necessity, and the nature of the process, were both embodied in the sacrificial appointment. This, therefore, it became man most scrupulously to regard. There could be no acceptable approach to Deity without it. But it was *without* this that Cain came. He despised or neglected that, the want of which rendered his offering essentially defective. Abel, however, *did* regard it. He obeyed the *whole* of the Divine intimations, and therefore he presented a more excellent—or more complete—sacrifice than Cain.

2. But further. There was not only this difference in the sacrifices,—there was a difference in the *men*. This difference, in fact, is indicated by the matter of their offering. In Cain's "fruits of the earth" there was an acknowledgment of dependence; there was an expression of gratitude; there was a recognition of the existence of God—a confession that he ought to be worshipped—and that worship should consist of thankfulness and praise. But this is not enough. It is not enough for man as a sinner. It might do for Paradise. All this might have been felt and performed by Adam in his primeval circumstances, and *then* it might have sufficed. But it will not do now. The

apostasy has occasioned an immense difference in our state, and requires a corresponding difference in our religion. *This*, for any thing we can tell, *may* be the worship of other worlds, whose inhabitants retain their innocence, and whose faith, therefore, may consist of fewer points and simpler elements; but it cannot be the worship of *this* world, which demands, as essential to acceptance, the penitent acknowledgment of our sinful state, and the unequivocal expression of dependence on a Mediator. These were the feelings, and this was the faith, of Abel. He received the several communications which it became the duty of his parent to impart. Adam would have the humiliating office of informing his sons of the apostasy; the melancholy task of interpreting certain appearances, or replying to certain questions, by referring to the fact of his own guilt. But, in connexion with this, he would have to speak of the Divine mercy, and of the peculiar mode in which it was to be sought. Along with "the things not seen," of the existence or occurrence of which he could give them indubitable proof, he would have to tell of the mysterious intimation of a great Deliverer,—the promise and the pledge of "things to be hoped for." From all this the mind of Abel received a corresponding impression. Part was corro-

borated by personal consciousness; part was an economy suited to his state. We cannot consider that he had any thing like clear conceptions respecting the Messiah; but we doubt not, that, in offering a sacrifice of blood, he would feel it to be demanded for some important reason, and would endeavour to ascertain its spiritual significance. What was his reward who shall say? Thus far we may obviously advance,—that he learned to acknowledge the desert of transgression; confessed at the altar his personal unworthiness; and hoped that the appointed offering, if it did not itself, indicated what *could* remove the penalty from guilt. He unquestionably felt the necessity of pardon; and he expected it in that way in which God appeared to signify it was possible to be obtained, and appeared to reveal himself as willing to impart it. This was faith. He received, in a manner consistent with the infancy of the Church, the testimony of the facts of the first dispensation. But in all this the mind of his brother held no sympathy with his. He neglected the Divine direction; he virtually denied the truths it involved; he manifested no repentance; he sought no mercy; he recognized no Mediator. Instead of a humble and chastened confidence, arising from the promise of pardon, and expressed in the obedience of faith,



he seemed to approach God in a spirit of self-righteous and impious presumption. His sacrifice itself was imperfect; the sentiments with which it was attended were positive sins. They were flagrantly inconsistent with his actual situation. They were more suited to the child of innocence than the subject of guilt. They were such as in an angel would have been the natural consequence of its unsullied virtue; but which, in the inhabitant of a fallen world, combined the most lamentable ignorance with the most unpardonable pride; and hence, instead of recommending his worship or improving his character, they only invested both with the shades of a darker and deadlier criminality.

Such seems to have been the difference between the two sons of our remotest ancestor, in the principles of their character and the nature of their worship. There was also a difference proportionally great in the expression towards them of the Divine regard. And there is still a difference in the moral instruction which their conduct respectively conveys to the church. These additional ideas, upon which we shall not dwell farther than to state them, are suggested by the other clauses of the text. "By faith Abel offered unto God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, *by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God*

*testifying of his gifts, and by it, he, being dead, yet speaketh."*

In what manner God "testified" his acceptance of Abel's worship, as it is not expressly stated either by Moses or Paul, it is not for us positively to affirm. We are not without means, however, of coming to a very probable opinion respecting it. Moses says, "that God had respect unto Abel, and to his offering," and that, in consequence of this, "Cain was wroth." The language appears to indicate, that either some audible or visible token of acceptance was employed; otherwise, the malignity of Cain could not have been aroused. When we remember, however, that, in after times, God was accustomed to express his complacency by consuming the offering with fire from heaven, it will appear, perhaps, most likely that *this* was the way in which he conveyed his satisfaction at first.—In consequence of this sacrifice being presented "by faith," that is, with a perfect persuasion, that what God had prescribed as the medium of mercy, would be an adequate security to a penitent man, Abel was accounted a "righteous" or justified person;—righteous, not as inherently so, but contemplated as such in the eye of the Sovereign, in consequence of his simple dependence on the Divine appointment, which had a direct relation to the merit

of Messiah. He is the first sinner recorded in scripture as partaking of the "righteousness of faith." In consequence of this, he seems to have obtained the epithet "righteous," as his peculiar distinction, for our Lord employs it respecting him, in a manner indicative of its proverbial use. Thus is Abel, though dead, yet spoken of, and held in remembrance by the church; or rather, thus, though dead, he still speaketh; he still speaketh both by his sacrifice and his faith, teaching that penitence, humility, obedience, and trust, which the doctrine involved in his offering is adapted to produce, and which, in his own character, were so eminently exemplified.

Many important reflections might be founded upon the various facts of the history before us. We need not conceal that we had once intended to suggest several. It appears, however, better to confine our attention to *two*, which are intimately connected with that specific subject, which it is the immediate object of these lectures to illustrate.

1. We observe, in the first place, that, from the moment of the fall, and under all dispensations, the medium of mercy has been the same. As soon as man became a sinner, he stood in need of a pardon; pardon has been



granted in every age upon the same consideration ; that consideration, whatever it be, (it is not our object at present to inquire,) which appears to the Divine mind, on contemplating Christ's crucified humanity. The *knowledge* of this has, in different periods, been different, according as the institutions of worship and the rays of revelation were more or less significant and luminous. There has been this difference with respect to men, but there has been none with respect to God. It was the seed of the woman that bruised the head of the serpent beneath the feet of the antediluvian believers, as well as beneath the feet of the recipients of the gospel revelation. The aspect of the atonement with relation to God, considered as a mediatorial transaction, has been invariably the same ; with relation to the church, it has assumed or presented different degrees of clearness, in proportion to the distinctness with which it has been revealed. Its conception, that is to say, by the human mind, was a doctrine gradually apprehended : in itself, or in the view of the Divine mind, it was virtually an eternal and unchangeable fact. Were it not so, the *whole* church could not,—and yet we know that every redeemed spirit from Abel himself *will*—join, with perfect satisfaction,

in the song of the Apocalypse, "Worthy is the Lamb, to receive honour, and glory, and blessing, *for* he was slain for us."

2. In the second place. It is possible to choose a religion from pride, which shall expose the professor to condemnation. The principles and requisitions of the gospel are unquestionably opposed to the self-sufficiency of the natural mind. It is humbling, after all we may have acquired of character among men, to have to come to God with a confession of destitution and depravity. It is humbling to have to acknowledge that there is nothing in ourselves on which we can substantiate a claim to acquittal or to recompense. It is humbling to have to sue for mercy, and to be compelled to receive it only in consideration of another's worth. It is humbling to have to submit to be conducted into the presence of the Supreme, like an utterly polluted and loathsome thing, on which the eye of Deity can never dwell with satisfaction except through the purifying medium provided by himself. All this is humbling; it is repugnant to the pride and arrogance of man's heart; and rather than believe it can be necessary, he will often please himself with forms and systems dreadfully delusive — more flattering but less safe. There is something

gratifying in the idea of coming to God like Cain, with a simple acknowledgment of his existence and his bounty. There is something sublime in the thought of thus approaching the eternal and infinite Spirit; claiming to be a part of his offspring, and going forth in high and delightful excursions on the grandeur of his nature, and the extent of his works. There is something in all this that just suits the loftiness of the being that feels his conscious immortality, and exults in his capacities of action and happiness. There is nothing here to humble and to awe. It may all be enjoyed by a mind profoundly careless of its moral situation. It is gratifying to intellect, and captivating to genius. It can be sung in poetry and embellished by taste. And yet, it is nothing but a particular form of the great principle of pride; nothing but a certain kind of the idolatry of nature. It may consist with, and will encourage, in fact, some of the worst passions of the heart—an utter repugnance to God's method of salvation, and a contemptuous opposition to those that receive it.

To conclude. Let us examine, my brethren, into our possession of that principle, the importance of which is obviously established by God's gracious acceptance of this primitive

saint. What he faintly perceived, we are permitted fully to comprehend. He addresses us now by his faith. Could he speak to us audibly from heaven, it would be to ask, "If he received the testimony of God when so imperfectly communicated; how much more should we, who enjoy the meridian light of his full revelation?" Let us remember, that there is "the blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than that of Abel." The one cried for vengeance on the head of the murderer; the other solicits and secures mercy for us all. *This* has a voice that both reaches the ear, and penetrates the heart, of offended Deity. "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth from all sin." He stoops in consequence "to beseech us to come and be reconciled to himself." Let us willingly obey the Divine invitation. Let us draw near to God "with a true heart, in full assurance of faith;"—in dependance on the sacrifice which he himself has prescribed;—through which we may certainly be accepted;—"obtain witness that we are righteous,"—"receiving the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

## SERMON III.

THE CHARACTER OF ENOCH.



HEB. XI. 5.

*By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.*

THE second name in this catalogue of the illustrious dead,—or rather, to speak more in accordance with the character in question, the illustrious *departed*,—is that of Enoch; a man whose eminent piety and glorious translation are this morning to become the source of our instruction and appeal. We were occupied last sabbath, by considering the faith of one of God's earliest worshippers; and we saw it manifested by a scrupulous attention to His immediate service: we are now to advert to the same

principle, but we are to see it displayed in a more extended sphere; to observe it prompting to other and diversified duties; and rewarded, at last, by the sudden and miraculous removal of its possessor from the earth.

In glancing at the first two names which occur in this catalogue of faithful men, and in indulging the associations with which they are connected, there are two sentiments strongly suggested to the mind, which we shall here embody as introductory remarks.

In the *first* place. The mention of Abel leads us naturally to inquire after the character of Adam: here is no mention of *his* faith, who, having taught his children to sin, ought to have taught them also how to believe and to repent. *He* stands not at the head of this cloud of witnesses, who, we should have expected, would have become as distinguished for the elevation of his piety, as he once was for his dreadful disobedience. It were natural to suppose that he should have been exhibited as an instructive example of penitence and faith, leading us back again to that Being whom he too successfully taught us to forsake. But this is not the case. The Holy Spirit, in none of his communications, has recorded any thing of the faith of Adam. However resolute and invincible it may ultimately have become; however nobly it may

have led him to act when surrounded by subsequent temptations; and however brightly it may have illuminated his departing hour, when he came to taste the bitterness of that death, which he himself had introduced into the world; however, we repeat, the faith of Adam may have been distinguished by such "infallible proofs," the Scriptures maintain a solemn and fearful silence on the subject. They attach no worth,—they attribute no greatness,—to the character of the primitive apostate; they never hold *him* forth to the admiration of his offspring, to kindle in them the flame of devotion or the purposes of virtue. They say nothing, indeed, of his utter and hopeless impenitence, and therefore they allow us to believe that he was recovered and restored; but, by passing him over in this roll and record of the good, where one of his immediate descendants finds such an honourable place, they seem to mark his presumption and to commemorate his guilt. There is an audible and an eloquent voice in this very silence of scripture. We are taught by it both the displeasure of Jehovah against sin, and that to the second Adam, rather than to the first, we are to look for the means and the motives of repossessing our primitive preeminence.

In the *second* place. We observe and are affected by the *contrast* between the fate of



Abel and Enoch. The one was crushed to the earth by the hand of a brutal and ferocious murderer; the other was conveyed to heaven, most likely by the "ministry" of some benevolent intelligence. The one met death in its most repulsive form, and will probably be the longest tenant of the sepulchre; the other entirely escaped it, and was the first to possess the happiness of perfect and immortal humanity. There is something instructive, in these characters being placed side by side on the page of revelation. The strong contrast they form strikes the mind as something remarkable. It seems to furnish an illustration of the mysterious diversities of fact and circumstance, which are perpetually occurring in the moral government of God. When we see righteous Abel falling beneath the stroke of inhumanity and violence, we are ready to fear that God hath forsaken the earth. While our feelings are yet occupied with the painful apprehension, another and an opposite picture passes before us, exciting another and an opposite train of emotion. We are called to lift our eyes from the blood of the first martyr, and to behold a member of that very species upon which the sentence of death has been pronounced, escaping from this guilty world, without experiencing for a moment a pang of its bitterness; and we are



as much astonished by the extraordinary interference of God in this instance, as we were confounded by the palpable want of it in the other; and we are taught, how cautiously it becomes us to pronounce on the character of Deity and the purposes of Providence, from single instances and isolated facts; how perfectly we may suppose harmony is preserved in the great whole, however inexplicable to us are particular appearances; and that, in the end, when we attain to that world where we shall no longer “see but in part,” we may expect God to prove his own interpreter,—to develop to his people the hidden reasons and the relative consistency of those events in his government, which, at present, are as mysterious in their occurrence, as the apparent abandonment of distinguished faith, or the bodily translation of imperfect virtue.

From this preliminary remark, we pass on to the more immediate subject of discourse. We are to exhibit to you the faith of Enoch. We shall consider, first, his life; and, secondly, his translation; as, respectively, its proof and its reward.

Our attention is first to be directed to the holy life of this distinguished patriarch. It is referred to both by Moses and Paul. In the

book "Genesis" it is described by a figurative expression of great and emphatic significancy—" *Enoch walked with God;*" and this, you may remember, is the first break which the historian makes upon his melancholy and monotonous account of the lineal descendants of Adam. He commences with our remotest progenitor, and advances through seven generations without once varying his language, or introducing an additional idea; he merely states, respecting each individual, that he was born—began sons and daughters—and died; and thus he proceeds, without the least intimation of moral history or religious attainment, until he touches upon the name of this venerable man; then, for the first time, he interrupts the dry uniformity of his narrative, and, in one short sentence, pours such a flood of glory upon the memory of Enoch, as has rendered his character illustrious in every age of the church. And it may be worthy observation, that in the few lines allotted to him in the annals of Moses, the statement that he "walked with God" is twice made, as if to impress us with the singularity and the importance of the fact. In the text, Paul tells us, that, before his translation, Enoch had this testimony, "that he pleased God;" an expression designed, I imagine, to be equivalent to the one we have just noticed. "Enoch

*pleased God.*" *How* he did this,—what was the *principle* which secured so transcendent an object,—the apostle has himself informed us, by intimating, that his conduct was the result, and his translation the reward, of that faith, "without which it is *impossible* to please Him."

It may be remarked, in general, that these brief but striking expressions of the sacred penmen relative to Enoch, are calculated to afford us the highest idea of his character and faith. He was, of course, a man of like passions with others; inheriting that nature to which the pursuit of excellence is so onerous and difficult; he was doubtless placed in circumstances where he was frequently proved; example, and opportunity, and appetite, might concur to seduce or to surprise him;—yet we have no fact, no insinuation, against his perfect and uniform propriety. Many of the worthies of ancient time were men of distinguished faith and unquestionable character; but there were periods, in the history of *some* of them, when they fell into the most flagrant violations of virtue,—when they abandoned their expectations of future reward for the possession of immediate indulgence,—sacrificed their faith at the solicitation of their senses,—and thus stained their memory with the dark shadow of their infamous irregularities.

Nothing of this nature is recorded of Enoch; partly, perhaps, from the narrow limits within which his history is confined; but principally, I imagine, from the extreme circumspection and purity of his life. His failings, whatever they were, excited no triumph in the enemies of truth,—they gave no occasion to the adversary to blaspheme,—they are not deserving the slightest hint in the record of his character:—he stands illustrious and alone; enshrined, as it were, in the great temple of Truth and Purity; of mere men, the most similar to Him, “who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.” I conceive him to have been distinguished, in an eminent degree, by the principles and fruits of that holiness, which was never seen in perfection but when infinite excellence appeared in the person of Christ. Some of those rays of glory which were then concentrated and combined, seem to have been first reflected by the patriarch, and to have rendered him an expressive type of the Messiah; and, as *He* “ascended up on high, leading captivity captive,” so did *Enoch* ascend, escaping the power of death, and becoming, by instantaneous transformation, perfect and immortal.

In attempting a more particular illustration of the character of Enoch, we shall endeavour briefly to enumerate the most important ideas

that seem to be included in the phrase "walking with God."

1. Divine revelation has itself asserted that "two cannot walk together unless they are agreed,"—unless there be a perfect understanding and a mutual confidence between them; and hence, the *first* thought which Enoch's character suggests, is that of the moral harmony subsisting between him and Deity, as the implied and necessary basis of their intercourse. So long as enmity exists between any individuals, there exists an invincible barrier to cordial correspondence. If persons so situated are compelled to meet, it will be with reluctance;—if they have to mingle together in society, it will be with internal disgust;—the hour that commands their contact will be dreaded when distant, and hated when it comes;—and the moment that terminates their unnatural communion, will be hailed as the harbinger of freedom and relief. In such a case, there never can be that warm and welcome salutation, that attends the meeting of those, whose minds are cemented by affectionate esteem;—there can be nothing like "*walking together*,"—nothing like that unsuspecting and perfect confidence which such a habit of intercourse implies. If, therefore, Enoch "walked with God," the fact strongly suggests, that no enmity existed to obstruct their



communion;—that, if any *had* existed, it was entirely removed, and had given place to other sentiments in the bosom of each,—to confidence on the part of Enoch, and to complacency on the part of God.

And such previous enmity there was; for “the natural man is enmity against God;” and Enoch, however eminent he may stand in the records of the church, was once, unquestionably, the subject of that alienation of feeling and desire from the holiness in which Deity delights, that constitutes the universal proof of the apostasy; and, therefore, before he could “walk with God,” it was necessary that he should be “at peace with him,” by the removal of those obstacles which sin and depravity interposed. *How* these were removed, we may conjecture, by observing the nature of the Patriarchal Dispensation, and its substantial connexion with the Evangelical Economy. For this we have adequate assistance in the case of Abel, whose faith is represented as displayed by the peculiar properties of his sacrifice. It is impossible to account for the early existence of animal sacrifice, on any principle but that of the Divine appointment, the idea is so foreign from what we should expect as the spontaneous suggestion of nature. It is so mysterious, however, as the requisition of infinite benignity, that, admitting

such appointment, it seems but reasonable to suppose, it must have been prescribed for some great and peculiar purpose; and that purpose, there can now be no question, from the subsequent discoveries of mercy, was, to prefigure the death and passion of the promised Messiah, and to intimate to the worshipper, in some faint degree, both the desert of sin and the medium of forgiveness. Presuming that such was its origin and design, it is easy to perceive in what way that friendship was primarily established, to which we are at present referring, as the very basis of Enoch's intercourse with God. There *was* originally an obstacle between the parties in question;—there was a barrier that prevented spontaneous and natural harmony;—the moral union between earth and heaven had been broken,—and before God could repose in man, or man walk with God, as he had formerly done in Paradise, it was necessary for this union to be restored, by the acquiescence of both minds in some suitable expedient. He who had been offended, had a right to prescribe what he pleased; or, if he pleased, even to withhold such interposition altogether. It *did* please him, however, in his infinite compassion, to cherish purposes of mercy;—and, previous to the “fulness of time,” when these were to be accomplished, to appoint a sacrifice of blood, as

the significant method of penitential approach, and the exclusive means of reconciliation. The rejection of Cain and his offering proceeded, as we have seen, as much from the deficiency of the sacrifice, as the unworthiness of the worshipper; indeed, the deficiency was a proof of the unworthiness, as it indicated a state of mind altogether inconsistent with his sinful situation. With such views of this divinely prescribed and exclusively efficient mode of approach to offended Deity,—the mode which represents the Messiah “as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,”—the mode by which man, immediately subsequent to the fall, was required “to acquaint himself with God and be at peace;”—with such views, we cannot but refer to the sacrifice and the altar, to account for the harmony which subsisted between Jehovah and Enoch. It was *here* that the patriarch, bending beneath the consciousness of depravity and guilt, learned to indulge hope and to subdue apprehension.—It was here he discovered, that, by simple submission to the Supreme will, and affectionate dependence on the Supreme assurances, “he might have his *delight* in the Almighty, and could lift up his face unto God.”—It was here, that “reconciliation” was effected and ratified,—that the contending parties were brought into harmonizing contact,—that the



one bowed himself as a polluted but penitent man, and the other displayed his graciousness as a forgiving God.—It was here, that the Eternal, remembering his primeval promise, and having respect to its ultimate fulfilment, received into his regards and accepted the person of the prostrate believer.—It was here, that He passed over his personal transgressions, and imparted that grace by which the "enmity" of his nature was removed;—by which a change was effected in the dispositions of the heart and the elements of the character;—by which a love to Himself and to holiness was excited and sustained;—and by which he was enabled, from that moment, to commence such a course of "fellowship with God," as led to a height and a habit of excellence, unparalleled, perhaps, in the annals of the Church.

In using the word "friendship," and similar terms, to express the first idea included in two persons walking together, it is to be remembered, that, in the present case, it is friendship of a kind altogether peculiar. It rests upon very different principles from those which enter into the fellowship of equals. It is supposed to subsist between the finite and the infinite—between the great and adorable God, and an erring and mortal man. It implies, therefore, what human friendship never can imply, the

unlimited submission of the one to the other. It supposes the subordinate mind to acquiesce entirely in the will of the Supreme. This principle lies at the very foundation of the union, and determines the conditions on which it is formed, preserved and perpetuated. Friendship of this kind can alone take place, when beings are brought into harmonizing contact, between whom there subsists an essential and infinite disparity.

2. The figure may further express the regard of the patriarch to habits of devotion. Enoch "walked with God" by a scrupulous attention to the exercises of worship, and by a constant recollection of the Divine presence. Every sacred engagement was performed with a holy alacrity. Every call to worship welcomed as it came, from its inviting him to contact with "the Father of Spirits." Every excursion of sanctified thought—every emotion of virtuous feeling—was sustained and encouraged, in anticipation of the intercourse, or as the result of its enjoyment. The thought of Deity was never unwelcome to him; he did not shun the idea when obviously presented, nor attempt to repress it if it arose in his mind. With any of his voluntary trains of reflection, the thought of God might easily assimilate. He would have suspected his virtue had this idea been long

absent; or if, when it came, it had appeared at variance with his cherished suggestions. All his undertakings he may be supposed to have referred to the Divine will;—his motives he remembered were exposed to the scrutiny of the Divine observation;—his conversation was conducted with the constant feeling that God was his auditor. “*God was in all his thoughts.*” If he looked upon the heavens, he was there; if he contemplated the earth, he was there; if he retired into his own bosom, he was there. He felt his presence pressing, as it were, upon his senses; it was the congenial element of his moral being,—the atmosphere in which his spirit was refreshed. There was no terror to *him* in the Great and Holy Name;—*he* felt no tumultuary agitation, because “God had beset him behind and before, encompassing all his ways;” the recollection of this was rather a source of sacred and animated pleasure,—it invested every thing with a new property,—it disclosed to him the spiritual essence that pervades the universe,—and thus gave him ever to feel as within the circle of the sublimest satisfactions. So familiar, I imagine, was the mind of the patriarch with the conception of God, and so awake to the insignificance which it teaches us to attach to every sublunary interest, that, to him, any extended or intense

process of thought or feeling must have appeared impossible, if *it* were to be supposed unconnected with either.

3. Another idea included in the figure, is that of active obedience. The language, you may perceive, refers to something more than a mere exercise of mind; it indicates not merely an attention to religious truth and devotional performances,—not merely to faith and worship,—but to all that is meant by active and practical virtue. Enoch “*walked*” with God. He was neither “dead” under actual sin, nor “asleep” in fancied security,—but he was “alive” and “awake” to the necessity of doing, and the opportunities of doing,—and he was occupied and busy about the moralities of life. He did not content himself with thinking and feeling;—he did not suppose it was enough to reason and speculate upon the “sayings of God;”—he did not imagine he had done all when he professed his belief in the direct or traditional announcements of the Divine voice;—he felt that this was but the foundation of the character—the beginning of “the work which God had given him to do;” that it afforded the outline,—showed the parts and proportions of which the moral man was to consist, but demanded from him unremitting assiduity to fill and to finish the picture. There is a passage in the prophet Malachi, which may

be appropriately applied to Enoch under this head of the discourse. Describing the character of a tribe under the name of its founder, it is said of him, "he walked with me in peace and equity." Here is a beautiful connexion, you perceive, between pardon and righteousness. He walked with God, not only in "peace," but in "equity;"—not only on the footing of friendship, as pardoned and reconciled; but on the footing of obedience, as one who felt the obligation to imitate and resemble him. And thus it was with Enoch. *He* "walked in all the commandments of God blameless;" he aimed at exhibiting in his habits and his history, so far as infirmity permitted, the *reality* of that "idea" of excellence, which his intellect had acquired, by imbibing the conceptions of God on character and duty.

4. A fourth and last idea included in the figure, is that of progressive attainment and continued perseverance. The phraseology refers not merely to activity, but to activity that leads *onwards*. Enoch, like all the other patriarchs, was a pilgrim and a stranger;—he was seeking another and a more congenial country;—he had a journey to perform before he could behold or enter it;—and in that journey he made perpetual advances, by the constant putting forth of his own personal exertion.



And he was not "*weary* in well-doing;"—the way might at times appear long, or monotonous, or painful, or perplexed,—but he persevered, because it was the only way in which he could be favoured with a Divine associate. In frequent and affectionate intercourse with superior excellence we catch something of its spirit, and naturally learn to resemble what we love; and thus, in walking with God, Enoch received such impressions of purity, and was so strongly attracted towards infinite perfection, as to be led onward from attainment to attainment, and from glory to glory. Every day, as it closed upon his character, saw it in some respect improved,—saw some folly repressed,—some temptation resisted,—some virtue increased in its effulgence,—some new idea added to his knowledge,—or some quickened impulse given to his piety. The character of Enoch, like that of every other man, arose from first elements and infantile excellence, and had to proceed through all the degrees of progressive advancement, before it arrived at its "perfect strength." But then it never stood still. He did not dissipate, in a gust of passion, what he had just gained by painful acquisitions;—he did not laboriously form his plans, and then become careless and slothful, as if they could realize themselves;—he did not neglect one part of

character, from exclusive devotion to another;—but, fixing a high aim, and exercising universal solicitude, he proceeded in his course “like the light of the morning, which shines more and more unto the perfect day.”

Such, my brethren, is a rapid sketch of the character and life of this great and distinguished man. Such as we have described, were the elements and the expressions of his devotion and his virtue;—such the qualities, which Jehovah honoured with signal approbation. God beheld, as it were, his own image, impressed upon one of the minds which he had made, but standing almost alone in the midst of a “perverse and crooked generation;” he put forth the hand which had adorned his servant with the “beauties of holiness,” and, in one moment, removed such pre-eminent perfection from the earth;—removed it to a higher and holier world, to meet with kindred excellence and to mingle with congenial society.

# SERMON IV.

## THE FAITH OF ENOCH.

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HEB. XI. 5, 6.

*By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him.*

PROCEEDING with the train of observation which we prescribed to ourselves in the preceding discourse, we propose, as our first object in this, to show how faith was illustrated and displayed in the life of Enoch.

“ Enoch, before his translation, had this testimony, that he pleased God;” “ but without faith it is impossible to please him;” therefore, all that constituted the excellence of Enoch, was the result of this principle. In his “ walking with God,” he exemplified the New Testament representation, “ we walk by faith and not



by sight." To be satisfied of this — satisfied that "faith" formed the source of his activity and zeal, it may be proper to refer to the apostle's definition of it, as already described, and to apply it, in one or other of its senses, to each of the virtues attributed to the patriarch.

"Faith is the perfect persuasion of things not seen, and the confident expectation of things hoped for." "It is the repose of the intellect, and the repose of the affections." All the statements of scripture, concerning the future or the past,—all its doctrines, respecting the Object of worship and the method of mercy,—are facts—"things not seen"—the admission of which, on the authority of God, originates what we term the repose of the intellect. That is to say, the human understanding, either searching into subjects which it cannot comprehend, or oppressed by inquiries and doubts which it cannot satisfy, takes the statements of God just as it finds them, and emerges from ignorance and anxiety to knowledge and rest. Then, the same authority that has said that such things *are*, is seen also to have promised that certain other things *shall be*; faithfulness becomes now associated with wisdom; God is not only believed "to be," but to be "a rewarder of them that diligently seek him;" his moral character inspires perfect dependence; the agitations of fear subside; a

calm and felicitous confidence is felt;—this is faith, as previously designated, the repose of the affections.

This principle, though we denominate it repose, is the exclusive source of acceptable exertion. To the one or the other of its aspects, or to both of them combined, you may refer each of the four grand features of Enoch's character. Speaking scientifically, we might say, that the moral phenomena of which that character consisted, are accounted for by this, and by nothing else. It is true, individual appearances, partially resembling some of them, may often, in other men, be interpreted by referring them to the operation of inferior agencies; but these, in Enoch, when properly considered, as to their true nature and beautiful combination, their extent and continuance, will be found to demand faith as their producing principle, and to demand it in no ordinary degree of purity and vigour.

In the first thing which “walking with God” was considered to imply, namely, friendship or reconciliation, faith is seen in both the senses already illustrated,—both as the persuasion of the intellect and the repose of the heart—a reception of truth and a confidence in character. We observed, in the last discourse, that, as there never has been but one way in which

a sinner can be pardoned, or in which he can acquire the friendship of offended Deity, we regard it as certain, that, since such friendship was enjoyed by Enoch, he had approached God and expressed his faith in the same manner in which Abel had done before him. That, conscious of sin and anxious for acceptance, he ended all his inquiries respecting how man was to be reconciled to God, by implicitly receiving the testimony of the fathers as to every matter connected with the question; and that, in consequence of this, he met with God over a bleeding sacrifice, feeling firmly assured that because he had appointed this mode of approach, he would have respect unto his promise and redeem him from death. Had he, like Cain, presumptuously departed from the requisitions of the Most High; or, had he lost his time and his tranquillity in curious speculations; that reconciliation would never have resulted, which formed the grand foundation of his intercourse with God. But, taking the principles of his religion on the authority of the speaker,—feeling that *He* knew best what to appoint and what to insist upon,—that his wisdom would appoint only what was proper, and his mercy require only what was requisite, and his truth fulfil every assurance,—he believed, and acted, and enjoyed; he displayed

his faith by an implicit admission of what God said, and a confident resting upon what God had promised; that is, by "the persuasion of things not seen, and the expectation of things hoped for," he acquainted himself with God, and was at peace.

In the second thing by which Enoch was distinguished,—the habitual recollection of the Divine presence,—there was a display of faith in that sense of it, in which it specifically relates to the "perfect persuasion of things not seen." The existence and the attributes of God are a part of these things. "No man hath seen God at any time." We believe that he *is*,—that his presence pervades and animates the creation,—“that he is about our path and about our bed, encompassing all our ways.” This is a truth,—an actual existing fact,—independently of us or our perceptions; its realization or neglect forms the principal difference between man and man; and the *degree* of intensity with which it is felt, is the most striking indication of the character. Few will deny the fact as expressed in words. Speak to any one you meet of the Divine presence, and you will find a ready admission of its reality and extent. The admission may be general; but that feeling persuasion of the thing which constitutes faith, which consists in its realization,

and which was displayed by Enoch, are extremely rare. *He* lived under an habitual impression of the truth; and this he could do only by a vivid perception of what was unseen; by illustrating, in fact, that apparent contradiction of sacred scripture, "*seeing Him who is invisible.*" This is one of the triumphs of the great principle which we are attempting to illustrate. It is an important part of the victory which it teaches us to obtain over the world. The palpable realities of the present scene are making such incessant impressions on the senses, that it requires a constant effort of abstraction to evade their influence, and to feel ourselves within the presence and inspection of the Deity. This power, however, is to be acquired; it consists in the exercise of faith,—that principle which enables the mind firmly to grasp the facts of the spiritual state, and which gives to the pure and simple conceptions of the intellect, all the force and distinctness of actual appearances.

The third and fourth things by which Enoch was distinguished,—his moral activity and progressive advancement,—may properly be classed together. That they are to be referred to the exercise of faith, two brief and general observations will evince.

First. All religious excellence is the fruit of that grace, which He who imparts every good



and perfect gift, has promised to communicate ; and it is obtained by that faith which confides in the promise, and which prompts us to seek it by fervent supplication. This grace is one of the things that are "hoped for." It is placed before the mind as ready to be given. The man may be oppressed by a sense of his weakness ; his heart may sink within him when he looks at the warfare to which he is called ; his courage may depart, and his zeal decay : but when faith can repose upon the promise of assistance, and the heart can utter its voice at the mercy-seat, the principle restores again his wavering resolution, by obtaining "grace to help in the time of need,"—it thus leads him to the fountain of life and vigour, and replenishes the soul with the essential element of practical activity.

Secondly. Perseverance is promoted by faith, as it is this principle that penetrates into eternity, expatiates, as it were, over the scenes of our anticipated being, and realizes the future results of the present existence. It teaches the mind to rise beyond the influence of immediate impressions ; it points, under all circumstances, with undeviating steadiness, to that better country, of the existence of which the Divine testimony is felt to be indubitable proof. It is this that animates effort to constancy

and attainment. Many are the insinuating seductions that would allure us to indolent repose, and strong is the tendency of nature to listen to their voice; severe is the self-denial, and difficult the warfare, which we have often to exercise and maintain; and, except by a faith which penetrates within the veil, and assures us both of the things that are "not seen," and of those that are "hoped for," we should be utterly unable to resist and overcome. There *are* circumstances under which, if this world were our only residence, virtue would have the worst of it; and when, if this were ascertained or presumed, no adequate motive could be brought to secure our perseverance:—there is sometimes a concurrence of all that can be desired for the successful perpetration of wickedness; impulse, opportunity, advantage, concealment; when no consideration, derived exclusively from the present state, could operate with power; but faith, displaying to the imagination the worlds that are not seen, with all their exquisite provisions for the production alike of agony and rapture, commands obedience and prompts decision when nothing else could secure or maintain them. In advancing with the characters to be successively contemplated, we shall have frequent occasion to notice their faith under this aspect. It is

often dwelt upon, indeed, by the apostle, and seems to enter into the very essence of practical religion; and well may it become to us a theme of observation and appeal, seeing that we too are required, both "by the terrors of the Lord, to persuade men," and also, to convey the inestimable assurance, that "our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding even an eternal weight of glory; WHILE we look, *not* at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

## II.

Having attempted to show how the character of Enoch was formed by the operation of faith, we proceed to notice the extraordinary manner in which God saw fit to remove him from the earth. "*By faith Enoch was translated.*"

By the translation of Enoch, we understand that he was taken up bodily into heaven, without sustaining that appalling infliction which we denominate *death*. "Flesh and blood," however, "cannot inherit the kingdom of God," and therefore we infer, that a miraculous change passed upon his person, similar to that which the apostle predicts, as awaiting those "who shall be alive



and remain at the coming of the Lord ;” similar, in fact, to that which passed upon the Lord himself, after his resurrection, in consequence of which, to use the expression of a learned prelate, all that was previously miraculous became natural, and all that was previously natural became miraculous. “ There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.” The latter phrase, though apparently self-contradictory, is justified by the fact to which we have adverted. Indeed, if it were not,—if there were no facts of such a nature recorded in scripture, yet, from our necessary ignorance of the spiritual state, it would be improper to call it a contradiction, for, for any thing *we* can tell, the production of a substance thus described *may* be within the compass of the Divine power. We believe that it is. We believe that *several* facts are stated in scripture, by which the simple assertion of the apostle is confirmed. “ There *is* a spiritual body.” This, we imagine, will retain a resemblance to that which at present we possess. It will have visible figure ; it will have the appearance of the present without its grossness ; it will not be dependent on food ; it will not be sensible of fatigue ; it will be incapable of decay ; it will partake of the immortality of spirit, and may, perhaps, of its velocity of movement. Now, a change which effected or

prepared him for all this, passed, we presume, on the person of the patriarch. The elements of his frame were essentially altered; its properties became different; its nature imperishable; its relation to earth, and its dependence on what is earthly, were destroyed. Enoch could not have enjoyed existence here, had he continued after this. He was now fitted for a more ethereal station; he was prepared for a sublimer world; he was capable of a higher agency, and nobler duties; he was alive to purer pleasures, and richer sensibilities: and he was removed, therefore, to the immediate presence of the Supreme, where all is congenial with that new nature which had been miraculously conferred. It would be altogether childish to reject the fact because we cannot comprehend it. It is mysterious; but so is the creation of a man at first, and so is the birth of every individual. There is something as incomprehensible in the secret and gradual processes that change a helpless infant into a man, as in that sudden transformation by which this incorruptible puts on incorruption, and this mortal puts on immortality. We can no more explain the one than we can the other; each is wonderful, but that which constitutes the wonder equally eludes our detection and developement in both. Admit, in any case, the exertion of infinite power, and

nothing is difficult. It can do any thing that does not involve a physical or moral contradiction; and there is neither the one nor the other in the miraculous translation of an eminent saint, at a time when such an event might possibly exert an immense influence on the religious history of the world. "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him."\*

Of the time and circumstances of this event we have no minute or specific information. The language employed, both by Moses and Paul, would indicate that it was sudden. The one says, "He was not, for God took him;" the other, "He was not found, because God had translated him;" both expressions seem to imply that the event was unexpected, at least to his friends. He was missed by them. He disappeared from his accustomed vocations; he mingled not with his usual associates. They seem to have sought for him, but discovered no retreat in which he was concealed. Something possibly was found indicating the event, or the knowledge of it might be imparted to some

\* The properties of the "spiritual body," as enumerated by the apostle, may be seen admirably illustrated in a sermon on the "Resurrection," recently published by the Rev. J. P. Dobson. The whole discourse, indeed, is distinguished both for its argumentative ability and vigorous eloquence.

holy contemporary ; or, after a short period of anxiety, the actual witnesses of the miracle might appear, and their testimony be accompanied by the pledges of indubitable truth. Perhaps the faith of the patriarch might have been previously tried, by an actual promise from God, respecting the mode of his removal. In the absence of all knowledge of any similar event, it would require a strong exertion of faith not to be staggered by the assurance ; and if, after the promise, the period of consummation were long delayed, this, in connexion with the ridicule to which it might expose him, would severely try the strength of the principle. It seems more likely, however, the change might be as unexpected to himself as it was to others. What a moment would be that of its actual occurrence ! What mingled sensations must have attended it ! What awe and astonishment, surprise and rapture, must have seemed to seize at once the spirit of the patriarch ! He was walking, perhaps, among the works of God, surveying the proofs of his wisdom and benignity ; or he was indulging deep and agitating reflections on the depravity of man and the mysteries of Providence ; or he might be pouring out his soul in prayer,—engaged in the very act of devotion,—and, “ in an instant,”—“ in the twinkling of an eye,”—the whole range of his

impressions would be transformed ! and, instead of the voice of supplication, and the society of men, he would feel himself joining in the services of heaven ; surrounded by the elder sons of creation, unfallen in state, and perfect in obedience.

### III.

The translation of Enoch, in relation to the purposes it was designed to answer, may be regarded in three different aspects ;—as it respected himself ; as it respected the existing generation ; and as it respects the church in all ages.

As it respected himself, it was intended, perhaps, both as a distinction and a mercy. An illustrious distinction it unquestionably was ; it was, no doubt, designed as a reward for his piety and faith, conferred by Him whom he had “delighted to honour.” But it is more especially to be regarded in the latter view. The world was advanced some centuries at the time of his birth ; and when we consider the early effect of the apostasy, and connect that with what would be the rapid advance of evil, and the corrupting influence of men upon each other, as the species continued to increase in numbers, there can be no doubt that impiety and wickedness were both great and general during the



life-time of this admirable man. Indeed, this seems to be implied in the very quality for which he is revered in the church. The language of the historian and the apostle equally suggest, that, in the days of the patriarch, "walking with God" was by no means common. Had the thing been common, it would have conferred no distinction. The majority of men did *not* walk with God, for, if they had, Enoch never could have been celebrated as singularly virtuous. Hence it is possible, we presume, that his translation might be an emanation of mercy as well as a "recompense of reward." His moral sensibility, I can imagine, might have become so fine, and his love to the law of God so exalted and incessant, that the sight of the depravity which would every where meet him, might produce the most exquisite and agonizing impressions on his heart. "Rivers of water," says David, "run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law." David was probably inferior to Enoch in his religious attainments, and therefore it *might* be that, having lived long enough to be a witness for God, God graciously removed him from a world which he was no longer fitted to inhabit; a world pregnant with nothing to him but sources of anguish, sounds of blasphemy, and spectacles of crime.

Considerable light will be obtained as to the aspect of this extraordinary event in relation to the people of his time, by remembering that Enoch was a prophet and a preacher of righteousness. We have no document from his own hand; but, in the Epistle of Jude, we have one of his prophecies preserved by tradition. This prophecy, too, is of a very remarkable kind. It refers to the coming of the Lord to execute judgment upon the ungodly, and to avenge the hard speeches which presumptuous sinners had uttered against him. Here two things are remarkable. *First*, That Enoch was a preacher and a prophet in the midst of "an ungodly and perverse generation." Hence, his translation might be intended as one thing in the order of means, by which the Divine Spirit, "striving with man," might design to give a solemnity and power to his instructions. It might be supposed, that some who disregarded his admonitions when living among them, or who derided and denied his pretensions to teach, might be impressed by this signal proof of the Divine approbation; and many an exhortation might be expected to be recalled, and to come with augmented force, when the preacher would be regarded in a manner as addressing them from heaven. A *second* consideration is suggested by the character and terms of the

prophecy itself. It seems that a principal topic with the prophet was a coming judgment and a future state. This was perhaps the very cause of those "hard speeches" of which he complains. It is easy to suppose that there were "scoffers" in those days as well as at present; men, who, while the prophet was proclaiming the coming of the Lord, might ask for the promise, or the precursors, of his coming, and point to the constancy and uniformity of nature, in which all things continue as they were from the beginning of the world: and, taunting him with his sobriety and self-denial, his absurd hypocrisy and puritanical pretensions, might insult him with their infidel jests, and reel to their wretched revelry with the maxim of their successors in their mouths—"let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." All this is at least *possible*; for my part, I think it *likely*; and I regard, therefore, the translation of the prophet, as intended to prove to an infatuated world the actual existence of a future state, and the positive fact of human immortality. Under whatever circumstances the miracle might occur,—whether secret and sudden; whether unexpected or promised; whether witnessed at the moment, or afterwards ascertained by subsequent evidence; there can be no doubt that it was known and believed by the existing



generation; some and sufficient means were employed by Providence to impress its truth upon the public mind; and the intention of Providence unquestionably was, to give a certainty and a sanction to those truths which the patriarch had preached, and to exhibit, in his own person, a splendid display of the reality of them all.

The purposes to be answered by the event in its relation to the church in all ages, may be briefly comprehended in the following observations. It should tend to encourage us amid the perplexities and temptations of the present state. We should *see* in it the truth of what we *hear* from the apostle,—“ God is not unfaithful to forget your works of faith and your labours of love.” “ Though the blessing tarry, wait for it; it shall surely come, it shall not tarry.” In contemplating the character and reward of Enoch, we should surely be animated in the prosecution of the contest to which we are called. We should be prompted to persevere, — to press onward, — whatever dangers may appal, or whatever temptations would seduce. There may be much to suffer and to do. There may be a thousand varieties of evil to contend with, in proportion as we aim with zeal and exactness “ to walk with God;” but, recollecting the recompense with which

*Enoch* was rewarded, we may be assisted to persevere with a constancy like his. We ought never to forget, that what he *is*, all of us may become. There will be no difference ultimately between him and the rest of the redeemed. There is a difference in the *manner* of their arriving at perfection, but there will be none in the fact of their perfection itself. The great majority of the faithful will not be translated as he was; but they will possess the same kind of glory when, rising from the sepulchre, "the Lord Jesus Christ shall change their vile body, and make it like unto his own glorious body, by that power by which he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." The event, therefore, to which we have so often adverted, has thus a tendency to encourage (if I may be permitted the phrase) a virtuous ambition in all who believe it; inflaming them with a desire to share in the rapture and partake the triumph of glorified humanity! Still further; as our faith in the promises of God is greatly assisted by knowing, not merely the truth that he can do what he has said, but the fact that in some instances he has actually done it; so, in this view, the translation of *Enoch* may prove of inestimable value to the church. God has already conferred all the benefits of a resurrection upon some of our brethren "of like passions with

ourselves;" and what he has done once, he can do again; what he has done for others, he can do for us; what he has done in a single instance, he can do in ten thousand. We have already in heaven, not merely the glorified body of the Lord, whose mysterious nature and immaculate perfection constitute so essential a difference between him and us, as at times to awe and to repress, rather than excite; but we have a representative and a brother, in one who was once subject to sin, and had to struggle with depravity, as much perhaps as the worst and weakest of us all; and we feel that the very same grace to which *he* was indebted for his illustrious virtue and sublime elevation, can, and will, if we trust it, convey us into the same region, and place us in safety by his side.

"Whatever was written aforetime was written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope;" and we doubt not, that by looking at the record before us, the mind of many a believer has been soothed and encouraged, so that the general purpose of the Spirit in the whole of revelation has been often and abundantly fulfilled with respect to this specific and memorable fact.

## IV.

By the history of Enoch there seems to be one great lesson inculcated and enforced. He is celebrated for "walking with God." The care with which this is recorded, in connexion with the miraculous fact of his translation, would appear to imply that there is something eminently remarkable in the circumstance. That, we imagine, is the complete conquest, which such a habit demonstrates had been achieved over the essential element of depravity; and the moral fitness which had thence necessarily resulted for the sublime engagements of the spiritual state. If there be any one thing that constitutes the characteristic attribute of the unrenewed mind, this is that thing,—*it does not like to retain God in its knowledge.* "The natural man is enmity against God." "God is not in all his thoughts." There is in many, a willing forgetfulness of his presence and his claims, and a repugnance to whatever would remind them of either. The idea of Deity is irritating and unwelcome; it is expelled from their associations as an intrusion and offence; or, at least, it is permitted to exert no influence on the regulation of feeling and the government of life. This inherent dislike to "walking with God," betrayed, either by

positive hostility or constant forgetfulness, is the distinguishing attribute of apostate natures. The proof of its existence and operation in man, is to be seen, not merely in the haunts and recesses of infamy and pollution :—there, indeed, you may obtain a dark and dreadful demonstration of the sin; but you may find the *principle*, in all its rancour and malignity, in many a man of eulogized excellence. Such a man may have cultivated and displayed much of the commanding and the attractive of character,—all that is “just,” and “pure,” and “lovely,” and of “good report;” he may be distinguished for unbending integrity, and expansive benevolence, and inflexible truth; he may never have been known even to approach to any thing like a great or voluntary violation, either of kindly feeling or honourable conduct; he may thus have earned from society the reward of profoundest admiration and respect;—but still it is to be remembered, that all the excellence for which he is remarkable, is required, by the law of secular morality, as well as by the law of God; obedience to either is sufficient to produce it; and, it may be, that a regard merely to the *first*—a sense of social obligation, and a concern for personal character—may have animated this *virtuous* man in the whole round of his moral acquisitions!—He may never have thought of



“living to the Lord;” never for a moment have acted with “a desire to please Him;” he may even deny his existence;—or if he admit it, he may ridicule the mention of the motive adverted to. *He* could have been all that he is, had he been *certain* that there was neither Divine law, governor, nor judge; and to him, in fact, there has virtually *been* neither, for the thought of them has never been the reason why he did or forbore any action, the avoidance or the performance of which, has distinguished his character. It is thus that the inherent proof of the apostasy, the essential element of sin, may reign in the man who is positively pre-eminent for his attributes of excellence, and regaled by the incense of surrounding admiration.

I can thus conceive of a virtuous atheist:—that is, I can conceive that natural disposition and purely secular considerations may produce a very high degree of personal and social excellence in a man who has brought himself to believe that there is no God. But it is to be remembered, that the man who professes to believe the contrary, professes to believe that there *is* a God, but who never thinks of him,—that man is virtuous just on the same principles and to the same extent; and, just in proportion, therefore, as any of you act, without an habitual recollection of the Divine presence, and a designed

regard to the Divine pleasure, just in that proportion is your virtue neither more nor less than the offspring of atheism. It is no better, and it cannot be worse,—worse, I mean, in relation to eternity; for, with respect to the present world, it may really be both beautiful in itself, and serviceable to you, but then *in* the present world it will have its reward. It arises from considerations entirely confined to it; it is inspired by motives exclusively earthly; so far as earth is concerned, we repeat our admission that it may actually be “lovely and of good report;” but, so far as *God* is concerned, as it is totally independent of all reference to *Him*, it will certainly appear to you, when placed in his presence, as nothing but a species of splendid iniquity!—For what is called virtue, therefore, to be of any value as a present preparation for the succeeding state, it must arise from a principle which shall be applicable to the duties of both worlds;—a principle which may influence in heaven as well as upon earth;—a principle upon which it may be possible to act when you are called to associate with spiritual natures, and when placed where God cannot but be seen; as well as when surrounded by present society, and placed where his presence is a truth to be believed. Now, such a principle is that, which consists of the vivid and practical realization of

this very truth. It is this, which, while it prompts to certain other virtues, which secular morality does not include ; pervades with a new property, and invests with a higher character all that secular morality can suggest. Under this principle the man does all he did before, but he does it from another motive—a direct and incessant reference to God. In such a man, the specific element of depravity is succeeded by the specific element of holiness. His excellence is thus of a kind altogether distinct from that of the world. When he leaves his present condition of existence, and his present *mode* of moral activity, he can carry with him the principle from which that activity springs, to any place where God is to be served. There is in the principle an essential congeniality to the engagements of the place. It requires to undergo no change in itself, it only changes its mode of practical manifestation. The man had before “walked with God,” and now he is “with him.” The difference is not in the *nature* of the thing, only in its circumstances. While here, whatever he did was done “unto God ;” but this is all that ever can be done, either by purest and highest natures, or by any nature in its purest and highest state. This, therefore, while it exalts and sublimates the duties of earth, is also the elementary preparation for the duties of heaven.



It is thus that the state of mind which distinguished Enoch is seen to possess such incomparable worth. It implied, not indeed the extinction, but the conquest, of the evil principle ;—that principle, which, disliking and opposing itself to God, leaves room for nothing in the character but the contracted aim and superficial appearances of secular virtue : and, it implied also the operation of another principle ;—one, which, delighting itself in God, infuses into virtue itself that which entirely changes its nature and its name, and which capacitates the man for all that is to constitute either the duty or the bliss of heaven. In exact proportion as this is possessed, are we prepared for the spiritual engagements of the kingdom of God. In that proportion have we approached, as it were, the precincts of eternity. When we consider how near Enoch must have approached, from the manner in which he is celebrated in the church, we seem to cease to wonder at his sudden disappearance. We begin to think it almost in the order of nature, that, having advanced so close to the spiritual state, —having come, as it were, within the sphere of its attraction—he should be drawn at length irresistibly into it, and should thus find his faith at once terminated and transformed by the instantaneous bursting on his senses of the glory and the gratulations of the upper world.

“*Infuses into virtue itself that which entirely changes its nature and its name.*”] That attention to personal and relative duties which renders character morally excellent, though it arise from nothing but considerations limited to the present state, may yet, in one sense, properly be denominated *virtue*. It is the virtue of this world;—that is to say, it is conduct exactly agreeing to all the relations sustained by human nature so far as this world is concerned, and, if there were no other world, and no God, would be the perfection of that nature. When, however, this same attention to personal and relative duties proceeds from other principles, from a constant and reverential regard to the Divine will, it is denominated *holiness*; then, it is the virtue of this world sustaining a new relation to Deity, just as, under the law, a vessel was considered “holy” when taken from common use and “consecrated to the Lord.” A man, before and after conversion, may perform the very same acts of self-control, generosity or justice; the same as to the material of them—as to what meets the eye of a human observer; but, in the latter case, their *nature will be completely changed* from what they were before, in consequence of their new relation to God, arising from their being done with a desire to please, and “consecrated” to Him. This direct relation or reference to God, of all moral acts and emotions, is, pre-eminently, the virtue of heaven. That is, it is the virtue of all moral natures whose conduct perfectly harmonizes with all their relations to all being. When this *kind* of virtue is contemplated as possessed by those of an apostate or depraved species, it is termed *sanctification*; that is, it is in them not a natural property but a superinduced effect, the result of some cleansing and purifying process. Every sanctified being is *holy*; but every holy being is not *sanctified*: both sanctified and holy beings are *virtuous*, but there is a virtue which is neither holiness nor sanctification. A natural man, possessed of what we term secular excellence, may be spoken of as virtuous, but nothing else.

An angel may be spoken of as either virtuous or holy, but nothing else. A regenerated man may be spoken of as either virtuous, holy, or sanctified. Thus, the word virtue, it seems, according to the sense with which it is associated, may be used in relation to each of these beings respectively, though the moral character of each is specifically different; hence, it is often employed to express either inherent or infused holiness,—that is, the holiness either of an angel or a saint. In this case, however, it is always to be understood according to its most enlarged and comprehensive signification; for, if it be understood otherwise, namely, in the lowest sense above adverted to, it is an imperfect, and may prove a dangerous substitute for the scriptural terms. On the whole, I cannot but think it is not without reason that its frequent use is objected to in Christian compositions. It occurs, perhaps, too often in the present publication; yet, I am quite persuaded that the employment of the term will not be injurious, if the distinctions now drawn be properly regarded, and the doctrines pervading the discourses be adequately felt.

## SERMON V.

THE FAITH OF NOAH.

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HEB. XI. 7.

*By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is by faith.*

WE now come to the contemplation of a character, whose name is associated with one of the most stupendous events in the history of the world. Last sabbath, we had the delightful duty of exhibiting an unparalleled display of divine regard, in the translation of individual excellence: this morning, we are to witness the unparalleled punishment of impiety and crime, in the violent infliction of universal death. In connexion, indeed, with the history of Enoch, it became us to advert to the probable wickedness of the existing generation; but *then* the

Spirit of God still continued to strive with man; the removal of the patriarch was itself an event adapted to awaken inquiry and lead to repentance: *now*, however, the time for such expedients of compassion is passed away,—the very forbearance of God is exhausted,—he is to be beheld “coming forth from his place,” “in the fury of his terrible indignation,” to punish and exterminate the “workers of iniquity.” Yet, even this is not to be a scene of undistinguishing destruction; because this world, depraved as it had become, was not the theatre of unmitigated guilt; for “*by faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is by faith.*”

The name of Noah, it has already been remarked, is associated with an event of stupendous magnitude. This event, the destruction of all flesh by water, with the exception of the patriarch and his family, is detailed with considerable minuteness by Moses in the book “Genesis.” It is referred to, as an admitted and unquestionable truth, by the prophets of the Old and by the apostles of the New Testament. In some of the devotional poetry of the Jewish church, in which the government of God is celebrated, it is mentioned as a matter



of fact familiar to the people. It is alluded to, in the same way, by our Lord himself; and, more than once, exhortations and reasonings, founded upon it, are addressed by his servants to the christian believers. The certainty of the occurrence is thus sustained, not merely by the authority of the primitive historian, but by all the evidence which goes to establish the inspiration of those other writers, who take it for granted in their prophetic and apostolic communications. And this, it may be observed, is an argument of considerable force, in support of those extraordinary events which the Jewish history records. If, respecting these, you have moments of scepticism, or if you feel it difficult, at times, to see the sufficiency of the external evidence, which exclusively supports the ancient documents; remember that we have another set of documents, whose truth and authenticity may be demonstrated with comparative ease and ample satisfaction; we have the history and the sentiments of those who could give their suffrage to nothing but truth; and we find them, under the guidance of that Spirit whose influence either replenished their minds or preserved them from error, actually giving their support to what was previously written; and thus all the mass of argument and proof that so illustriously sustains the one set of writings,

does, by this means, as really and emphatically sustain the other set of writings;—the whole evidence that proves the inspiration of the evangelists and apostles of the Christian church, also proves the inspiration of the historians and prophets of the Jewish church; for we find the former expressing their belief of all that the latter relate, and constantly referring to them “as holy men of God, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

A universal, and universally destructive deluge, is certainly a most appalling and tremendous fact. It is not to be accounted for on merely natural principles. It must either be denied altogether, or admitted to be miraculous. Considered as miraculous, it is of course to be regarded as the direct infliction of the Supreme Ruler. To this thought succeed our notions of his moral character, and then we begin to feel perplexed from the apparent inconsistency of such an event with the attributes of perfect wisdom and infinite beneficence. Here, however, let us remember, that the consistency of what God does, in any case, depends, not upon our seeing it, or upon any creature, or any class of creatures, seeing it. If he does the thing, it must be right from that very circumstance, however inexplicable to inferior natures. They may ultimately be able to comprehend it; but

if not,—if it remain for ever a riddle and a mystery,—*their* duty is still the same,—to feel that it must be good, and wise, and just, because done by Him who is perfect justice, goodness, and wisdom; “who giveth no account of his matters,” and whose “glory,” at times, “is to conceal a thing.” Whether, indeed, any part, or any act, of the Divine government, in connexion with any world, will remain *eternally* inexplicable, it is impossible to say; it would rather seem *not*; as this would appear to contradict the expressed purpose of God to justify his government in the view of the universe, and be inconsistent with the predicted happiness of mind. But *were* it to be so,—were such an eternal difficulty to be felt,—then, the submission already described, would be, *eternally*, the duty of his creatures. It *may* be, however, that, even in the future world, mysterious displays of the Divine conduct shall often occur; shall be explained by subsequent acts, and succeeded by similar displays; and that the employment of our minds upon these, to ascertain what they involve of the knowledge of God, may be one of the means for exalting our nature, enlarging our conceptions, and perfecting our reason; and if so, then, whenever any such display passes before us, we shall feel it right to do in heaven, what some proudly refuse



to do upon earth,—desire, as the angels at present, reverently to explore the sacred wonder, but be willing to wait for the perfect development to be afforded by others. If such humility would consist with the ultimate state, both of unfallen and redeemed intelligences, surely it should be felt by *us*, while in the infancy of our being; while placed in a world of temptation and darkness, ignorant of almost every thing but this,—that our condition demands and our circumstances are intended for the trial of our faith. It is not for us, with our limited knowledge and imperfect vision, to sit as judges upon what God does, to pronounce on its fitness and propriety; but, first satisfying the mind that he *has done* it, it becomes us to look at the matter, whatever its mysteriousness, with such a profound conviction of its entire rectitude, as may dispose us to receive from it impressions of piety and topics of instruction.

“First satisfying the mind that he has done it.” The submission demanded, even from us, is not, you observe, an uninquiring and unintelligent submission. It supposes inquiry and knowledge up to a certain point, and can only be exercised consistently beyond it. It implies the assurance of the understanding upon two things, namely, the reality, and the sense, of a divine record. The first of these being admitted,

involves the general admission that *all* it contains is true; the second signifies, that the specific meaning, conscientiously attached by the mind to any specific passage, is so; then comes the inevitable consequence, that anything thus found to be in the Record, however it may seem, at first, irreconcilable either with reason as it exists in us, or with our notions of the Divine character, must be believed to be abstractly consistent with both,—with the one as it exists in the Divine mind, and with the other as it appears to the Divine contemplation; and that our duty is, either to discover, if we can, by frequent and protracted thought, the harmony believed to exist between this specific idea and the rest of truth; or to terminate the fruitless inquiry by a devout acknowledgment of the heights and depths of the unfathomable wisdom, leaving the interpretation of the dark enigma to future communications of knowledge, and a wider range of experience. Proceeding upon these principles, it will be found that the two parts of the process just described, do mutually assist and support each other; that, in proportion as we humbly study any mysterious statement which we believe to be of God, its first aspect of mysteriousness will contract and diminish, and its actual consistency with primitive truths come, in some degree, to be

perceived; and as this proceeds,—as our knowledge enlarges and our ideas brighten,—we shall feel an increased and increasing conviction that it *is* of God. These principles are easily applied to the matter before us. Here is the mysterious fact of the universal destruction of the world by water; you admit the truth of the Record in which it is related; you know that the terms of the Record state its extent, refer it to the dreadful depravity of the species, and connect it with the preservation of distinguished virtue; looking at it, humbly and seriously, in all its bearings, it will not be difficult, perhaps, to learn the lessons which it teaches, either of the character of God or of humility to man.

Permit me farther to remark, that christian instruction to a christian society, always presupposes the first step in the above process; it takes for granted both the truth of the Record and the truth of the characteristic interpretation of the assembled sect. At times, the argumentative defence and developement of either may be proper, for the conviction of unbelievers or the benefit of the body, but, in general, they are legitimately and necessarily assumed; for it would be obviously absurd,—as absurd, in fact, as it is unreasonable in expectance,—that we should, every time we assemble, re-establish admitted principles, lay again the very foundation

on which, as a society, we stand, and turn the hours devoted to improvement into a season of unprofitable debate, before we dared to use our materials, the facts and sentiments of our faith, to the ultimate purposes they are intended to serve. Such a course would be especially improper in a series like this of practical exhortations, in which the very object is, to address those who are "grounded and settled" in the belief of the Record, and to urge them, by admitted examples, to the higher display of the force and fruits of their own principles. That there has been a deluge, connected not merely with the natural but the moral history of our world, you and I believe, because we believe that God has said so. *There*, with us, all argument ends. We require nothing farther to confirm our faith. Our business is to improve the *fact* to the excitement of devotion and the advancement of virtue. Yet, admitting all this, it may not be improper to advert, for a moment, to two or three topics, tending, irrespective of Revelation, to show the probability of a deluge resembling the Mosaic.

## II.

The deluge is stated by Moses to have occurred between four and five thousand years



ago. This date, extending as it seems into a vast antiquity when compared with the life of man, is comparatively recent when contrasted with the distant creation or eternity of the world. Mankind are represented as having then re-commenced from a single family, and progressively expanded over the face of the earth. This account seems to be corroborated by the general history of nations. Their origin and establishment are subsequent to this period. No records on which dependence can be placed reach higher or so high. The annals of authentic history,—the time when it can be said that ancient communities became numerous or formidable; when they extended their limits, planted colonies, refined their manners, and formed their literature; the known rise of the arts and sciences, and the late periods of useful inventions; all tend to confine our attention *within* the date to which we have referred. The world must either have been created about that time,—or it must then have begun to be inhabited,—or man, having lived for ages or from eternity in a state of unvaried barbarism, must suddenly have become civilized and active,—or his residence must have undergone some great change, by which society, though organized and advanced, was thrown back again, reduced to its first elements, and compelled to

re-commence its history and its progression: for, had not the one or the other of these, or something of like nature, actually occurred, or been the case, we must suppose that the annals of the species would have been very different from what they are, both in their number and their contents. It thus seems that the Mosaic date, not of the creation but of the deluge, is that, far within which profane history is confined, and to the correctness of which as, in one sense, the beginning of the species, she thus gives her effective though tacit testimony.

The idea that comes next to this, advances us a step farther. It selects, as it were, from the previous suppositions of what must have occurred about the date of the deluge, that one which is the asserted truth of the Mosaic History, and to this it gives its specific corroboration. We refer to the fact, that the earth bears upon itself the visible evidences of the operation of water. Upon this truth it would be superfluous to expatiate. It is admitted and unquestionable. In all parts of the world,—at every height in elevated regions, and at every depth from the surface, are proofs discovered of the fact. Marine productions are met with every where. Deposits and formations which could only have been made by the presence of the sea; appearances which could result

from nothing but the universal diffusion of the aqueous element; are among the ordinary and obtruding phenomena of terrestrial existences. Nothing in the whole circle of science is so unequivocally established as this. All nature rises, as it were, to afford evidence in support of the assertion. Her language is intelligible, loud, universal, distinct. Interrogate her, as you please, in any place or in any manner, she returns a similar reply. A person may as well refuse to credit the daily testimony of the senses, as that which proceeds from the physical appearances of the world in behalf of a general inundation.

A third topic conveys us a step farther than this. It gives specific *moral* characteristics to the general and physical fact, and thus accumulates around it a number of ideas, which are found to possess a most remarkable coincidence with the principal particulars of the sacred story. The evidence to which we now refer is that of universal tradition. There are, if we may so speak, numerous marks and vestiges left by the deluge upon the *mind* of the species, just as there are the marks last enumerated left upon the *globe*. These are to be found in confused historical recollections; in the institutions of religion; in mythological fables; and, sometimes, even in the speculations of philosophy. No nation has been found, in which traces of this



kind, constituting a traditionary remembrance of the fact, are not to be discovered. Wheresoever you find men, you find some detail or other of a disastrous and destructive flood, by which all but their remote ancestors, the root of the nation, were destroyed. You find, too, among their deities, the representation of some god in connexion with water; in connexion with a ship, or ark, or vessel, rudely and confusedly indeed, but still obviously referring to the Mosaic account. The uniformity of the traditions respecting those who escaped, is positively astonishing. Wherever you find them at all particular, and you find this often, they agree, in many and important points, with each other and with us. It is always one family and only one. It is never said to have been by accident, but as the result of divine protection, and the reward of distinguished virtue. It is always by means of a vessel, and not merely by gaining some elevated height. And the occasion of the calamity is invariably represented, as the anger of the gods excited by the wickedness of a degenerate age. Traditions of this nature, involving, with different degrees of distinction, the record of an extraordinary event of a specific character, in the former history of the world, are to be met with in almost every country. Every effect must have a cause; a number of

common or similar effects, must have a similar or common cause ; effects like these must be accounted for, and we know not how that can be consistently done, without referring them all to the same origin, and making that origin an actual occurrence.

What we have thus rapidly adverted to, is but the mere outline of what might have been advanced ; and that, only of two or three topics, out of several that could legitimately have been brought into the argument. These, however, are sufficient for our purpose. They show that there *are* testimonies distinct from revelation, by which that of revelation is corroborated and confirmed ; that the denial of the Scriptures may involve the denial of more than is imagined ; that the principle of resistance to the Divine Record may be as unphilosophical as it is impious, and might lead, if consistently carried out, to the rejection of all history, and almost of the grounds of physical science. At any rate, it must be admitted to be a series of most singular coincidences, that authentic history should be limited within the date of the deluge rather than the creation ;—that the fabrications of the Bible should be so fortunate as to include both ; that they should first suggest that, which seems to be required by uncorrupted reason, and then that, which best interprets physical

appearances;—that all nations should unite, as it were, in one vast conspiracy, to support the falsehood and deceive each other;—that unscientific and ignorant men should have anticipated the distant discoveries of science;—and, that the sensible monuments of nature should seem to be inscribed with the lie of the religionist. The language of nature, indeed, is said to go farther than that of revelation, and to speak of a larger supremacy of the destructive element than is stated by the record; but this part of her evidence, we believe, may be more easily reconciled with the account of the historian, than those particulars which support the historian, can be reconciled with the principles of a sceptical philosophy.

### III.

We advance, from these preliminary observations, to the direct consideration of the faith of Noah. This we shall attempt to exhibit in a series of remarks illustrative of the facts of the history and the character of the man. It is our purpose, after this, to explain, in a number of inferences, such general principles, as the circumstance of the deluge seems to involve, respecting the whole of the Divine character and government.

The first thing to be observed in the contemplation of this subject, is the *occasion* of the universal catastrophe,—the *moral cause* which impelled the Divine Being to such a signal demonstration of displeasure. The language of the historian, in relation to this, is very remarkable. His expressions, both literal and figurative, are distinguished by such a depth and intensity, and some of them are so frequently repeated, as to indicate, if the language may be allowed, the peculiar and strong excitement of the Sovereign Mind. God is represented as looking down from heaven, “the habitation of his holiness,” to survey the earth which he had made ; that earth, which was welcomed at first by the song of angelic gratulation ; which he looked upon himself with paternal pleasure, as, rising, beautiful and perfect, from the maze of primitive confusion, he pronounced it “good.” God looked down upon it to observe the condition and the character of him whom he had constituted its lord ; who was formed in his own image, distinguished by high capacities, and invested with attributes of greatness. In the pleasurable anticipations of the preceding eternity, when contemplating his own “idea” of the projected world, “he had rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men ;” but now, looking on the



species in its living reality, he beheld its utter and universal degradation; he witnessed the perversion of intellect, the violation of purity, the extinction of every thing originally great; and, loathing, as it were, his own work, "he REPENTED that he had made man upon the earth." What an expression is this, my brethren! "*It repented God that he had made man.*" Man, the last and most perfect offspring of creative energy;—man, who was the product, so to speak, of the Divine "counsel," as well as power,—to whom the inspiration of the Almighty had given understanding; whose faculties were so admirable, whose capabilities were so various, whose destination was so august;—so utterly debased had he become,—he, on whom such skill had been expended,—that the very being who raised the structure and beautified it with all its embellishments, "*repented*" himself of the act. We know that this is a phrase which cannot be received in its literal acceptance; but we may judge by it of the occasion which demanded such a bold, and almost unnatural, allusion to our personal experience, to convey any thing like an adequate idea of those mysterious emotions, with which Deity contemplated the depth of human degradation.

The impression, however, produced by this language, though deep, is indefinite. It requires

something less general sufficiently to affect us. The figure, indeed, indicates the enormous results consequent on the apostasy, by attributing to them such an effect upon the mind of God; but, in itself, it conveys nothing as to their specific characteristics, as to what they *were* in relation to man. But this is done in other passages which descend to particulars; which trace the poison infused into the moral system by the primitive sin, in all the variety and extent of its malignant operations. There are *three* phrases employed for this purpose, each of them remarkably expressive; each proceeding in the description farther than the other; and all, when combined, constituting an appalling picture of unmitigated turpitude. It is said, FIRST, “*that the thoughts and the imaginations of man’s heart were only evil continually.*” THEN, “*that all flesh had corrupted its way.*” And LASTLY, “*that the earth was filled with violence.*” Let these different representations be regarded as parts of one whole; let them be united by the imagination, and considered thus as comprehending the character of the species; and nothing will be wanting to complete the idea of a state of society distinguished by the total extinction of every thing like virtue.—In these phrases, we have first, the perversion of the intellect and the heart; and that, too, depicted with the qualities

of universality and permanence. "*The thoughts and imaginations of man's heart are only evil continually.*" Death, spiritually speaking, seems to have seized and corrupted the very sources of life. The operations of the mind were imbued with evil. The judgment was employed in adopting and defending error; the affections in cherishing the desires of universal selfishness; the memory in the complacent recollection of scenes of guilt; and the imagination in combining images of impurity.—Such internal disorder among the moral faculties, was naturally productive of practical mischief. "*All flesh corrupted its way.*" The word "way," in scripture, signifies what we mean by a *course* of conduct,—the observable and permanent habits of the life. Upon this, in the men of the former world, the state of their minds produced the most disastrous results. It "*corrupted*" their way. It extinguished the sense of moral obligation; it sapped the honour of public character; it poisoned the sources of social enjoyment; it destroyed the foundation of private virtue; it disrobed men at once of the decent and the dignified.—Nor was this all. Another and terrible figure is to be introduced into the picture. "*The earth was filled with violence.*" You are to add the operation of the *malignant* passions to the blasphemies of a perverted



intellect, and the excuses of unrestrained sensuality. It is not till this is done that you obtain the entire conception conveyed by the whole of the sacred testimony. "The earth was filled with violence." The world, intended to be the seat of moral order, was transformed into a vast theatre of confusion. The clashings of interest, the collision of parties, the lawlessness of oppression, the graspings of eager cupidity, the indignant retaliation of supposed or inflicted wrong, with all the numberless sources of social discord, appear to have operated then, with a more fearful malignity than they have operated since. There is no express mention of war; but we cannot doubt that man's wicked ingenuity discovered, long before the flood, this infernal method of gratifying selfishness and acquiring distinction. War must have been inevitable, we should think, from the state of society; it seems necessarily involved in the scriptural terms. The example of Cain was no doubt speedily followed on an extended scale. While private animosities became frequent, aggravated and prolonged, accident might occasion, or the revenge of some commanding character suggest, the encounter of numbers. This would soon excite the ambition of becoming "men of renown;" would lead to the construction of instruments and the niceties

of discipline; and would terminate, at last, in the splendid enormities of the assembled field and the sanguinary conflict. Not only was there war, indeed, among the antediluvians, but it was accompanied, I imagine, with circumstances of atrocity and deeds of violence, to which, in the sight of God, succeeding times have never yet furnished a parallel. Thus, the language of scripture in relation to the *moral cause* of the deluge, is observed to be remarkably expressive. When we collect its various representations, and contemplate their united amount, we see that human nature was universally deformed by gigantic excrescences of impiety and crime; and we wonder not that Infinite Perfection should determine to disburden his own world, by lifting up his arm in anger, and sweeping them for ever from the earth.

He determined to do this. He communicated his intentions to Noah; commissioned him to warn the world of the impending destruction; and to prepare an ark for the saving of his house. In the obedience of the patriarch to these several directions, faith was eminently conspicuous. To the illustration of the principle, as exercised in connexion with this event, we shall immediately pass. It will be proper, however, to make a previous remark

on the scriptural description of Noah's general character, which will evince the propriety of limiting our attention to this one act for which he is celebrated.

This remarkable individual, who ultimately formed, as it were, the link between two worlds, was distinguished from his original contemporaries, by diametrically opposite principles and pursuits. He is said, like Enoch, to have "walked with God;" to have entertained the conceptions, cultivated the devotion, and practised the virtues implied by the phrase. He is also described as "perfect" in his generation; a term employed in the Old Testament to express unbending rectitude, uncorrupted integrity. Like Simeon, he was "a just man and a devout;" epithets which appear to express an acquaintance with the principles, and the possession of a degree, of universal virtue,—the union of religious attainment, and the emanations of practical excellence. Such was Noah. And he was such *alone*;—such, though surrounded by corrupting examples,—by every form of impiety, oppression, luxury, and fraud.

—— "faithful only found  
Among the faithless."

As his general character resembled so remarkably that of Enoch, our former remarks on *his* faith,

as the source of all his holy acquisitions, might be repeated here, as they would equally apply to that of his descendant. The principle in one or other of its forms is that to which all excellence is scripturally ascribed. Having, already, however, largely illustrated the general truth, our business is necessarily limited, in the present case, to the mode of its display in that one act, for which the second Father of mankind is distinguished in the church.

#### IV.

1. Noah was warned of God respecting a matter altogether unprecedented; "a thing not seen as yet." He had no experience to assist his belief; no knowledge of any corresponding displays of the Divine character to which he could advert, and, by contemplating which, reason might be able to facilitate faith. An unqualified conviction of Supreme rectitude, and a perfect persuasion of presiding goodness, were required of the patriarch, under circumstances apparently incompatible with both. This constituted his first trial. There are two ways in which it might be felt; in which unbelief might have resisted the stupendous announcement; occasioned his rejection of the divine testimony; and rendered him "disobedient to the heavenly

vision.”—We know nothing of the time, the manner, or the place, selected for the communication of the astounding intelligence. It is an allowable liberty, however, to conceive that it might be at the hour of worship—at the period when the prophet indulged his pious philanthropy by intercession for his “brethren according to the flesh.” The place was, probably, a sacred eminence, where he had devoutly erected an altar for sacrifice; where he spent many a season of fellowship with heaven; and *from* which he might be able to survey cities and palaces surrounded by the grandeurs of the primitive earth,—the combined exhibitions of the achievements of man, and the opulence of nature. Conceive this. Conceive the “man of God” so situated, when his attention is arrested by the Divine voice, and when, as at other times, he listens for some communication from the “holy oracle,” that shall enlarge his knowledge or purify his joy;—and imagine, if you can, what would be his feelings, when he first understood the “burden of the Lord,” and formed a distinct conception of the threatened catastrophe. He would be penetrated and absorbed by conflicting emotions. They would be those of astonishment, hesitation, and doubt. ‘*Can* this be the voice of God? Is it not rather a diabolical suggestion, intended to excite dis-



honourable thoughts, and lead to the blasphemy of his name? It is true, the wickedness of man is great; but such mighty multitudes exist,—so vast must be the worth of those prospective immortals! so glorious would be their recovery and return to God! and to effect this, must be within the power of the Supreme!—Their destruction—their utter and universal destruction! surely this can never be contemplated by “the Father of the spirits of all flesh.”—And this earth,—the work of his own hand, adorned by his own bounty, filled with every form of the wonderful and the fair,—*this* to be destroyed!—It cannot be.—“Wherefore should he have made all men, and all things in vain?” Again. The faith of Noah might encounter another obstacle; unbelief might betray itself by different doubts;—‘All the families of the earth to be exposed to the threatened doom, and *mine* only excepted! Who am I, to be judged worthy this awful distinction? The *mercy* appears as improbable as the *wrath*. Some illusion is operating which I cannot comprehend. It can neither be the voice of Him who is “full of compassion,” nor of Him, whom, alas! I have so frequently offended.’—Suggestions of each class might certainly arise in the mind of Noah. I have no doubt that many of them did. But his faith enabled him to repel them. It led him

to believe, however difficult to nature, what he felt convinced it was God that said; and it led him to expect, however wonderful the mercy, what he was equally convinced that God had promised; and this faith—"this perfect persuasion of a thing not seen, and this confident expectation of a thing hoped for,"—was evincèd by appropriate proofs in his subsequent behaviour; by his actual attention to the erection of the ark, and his entrance within it for the salvation of his house.

The faith of Noah was thus primarily manifested by a reverential "fear" of the "great and dreadful God;" a belief of the Divine threatenings, leading to the preparation of the means of safety. Faith, in the simple and practical view we are attempting to take, consists, you perceive, in a regard to the *whole* of the Divine testimony, to whatever that testimony relates. If, for example, the truth, specifically contemplated, be a simple intellectual announcement, faith is the acquiescence of the understanding in its absolute certainty. If it be a promise of good, faith is confidence in its fulfilment. If it be a threatening of evil, combined as all threatenings are with the merciful provision of a method of escape, faith is apprehension concurring with flight to the appointed refuge. It was thus that it first operated in the mind of Noah.



2. Another illustration of the power of faith, as seen in the conduct of the patriarch, may be taken from his persevering attention to the structure of the ark, and his consequent continued warning of the world.

God never brought a judgment upon any nation without previous, distinct, and intelligible warnings. This is a principle of the Divine government illustrated by the whole history of the church and the world. Lot warned Sodom; the Israelites, Egypt; their prophets, the Israelites; Jonah, Nineveh; Jesus and his apostles, Jerusalem and Judea. And thus Noah, both by his actual declaration of the "word of the Lord," and his building in the view of the people the vessel of safety, testified the Divine intentions, and warned the world of the "coming wrath." The perseverance of the prophet amid the complicated opposition which he had unquestionably to sustain, evinces his unqualified confidence in the truth of God, and his uncommon vigour of principle and purpose. The work itself, which he was commanded to perform, required immense labour, and occupied many years. In the course of this time, subject, as he certainly was, to the fluctuating feelings of our common nature, many might be the doubts, and painful the suspicions, which his faith had to encounter and expel. The absence of all im-

pression from his preaching, though accompanied, perhaps, with agonizing emotion; the apathy of a thoughtless, or the contempt of an incredulous, age; the rejection of his message, and the ridicule of his fears; might all concur to repress his ardour, and constitute a severe test of his fidelity. That he was thus tried from without, by the conduct of men, and in a variety of ways, appears to me not only probable but certain. I doubt not that he was incessantly insulted,—scouted as a fanatic or a madman, for spending his time upon that which, it would be said, could never be of any use but to perpetuate his folly. It is generally supposed that arts and sciences were cultivated to a considerable extent by the antediluvians. Nature, at any rate, would be as bountiful and as unrestrained as at present, in conferring original capacity; or, perhaps, in her youthful achievements and primeval communications, she reached a standard and bestowed with a munificence which has never been repeated. There were then, I imagine, persons distinguished by every form of intellect and genius; there was native power and acquired perfection; there were poets, architects, philosophers, and other and brilliant modifications of mind, as we have them now; and every one of them, I can suppose, exerted their peculiar acuteness, and combined their

separate ability, to pour contempt upon the man of God. When the matter was sufficiently known to become a topic of general conversation, crowds of persons would assemble to look at the work as it advanced, and to laugh at the labour and the apprehensions of the patriarch. One would ridicule its form and dimensions; another the absurdity of a ship upon a mountain; the philosopher might demonstrate the physical impossibility of the predicted fact; and the poet might exercise his wit in contemptuous ballads on the doating enthusiast. All this I think likely; and to sustain it all, year after year,—to preach without success,—to oppose apparently the intelligence as well as the frivolity of the age,—to act only to become a by-word and a jest,—this would require a faith of no ordinary character; and Noah's actual perseverance in defiance of it all, proved *his* to be distinguished by incomparable strength.

3. The last circumstance from which we illustrate the faith of Noah, is the calm confidence with which he committed himself to the Supreme protection, at the time of the actual catastrophe. It is true, this confidence would be greatly encouraged by two circumstances,—by the miraculous approach of many animals to the ark, and the commenced infliction of the threatening judgment. Both of these

would assure him that he had not been deluded by imaginary impressions. There was still, however, a demand for firm and steady faith, as, at the moment of first entering upon danger, we often experience misgivings, which in prospect we anticipated not. After his protracted trials of another kind, *this moment* arrived to Noah. He was called to the commitment of himself to the Divine disposal in a way which none had ever been called before. His work was finished,—his testimony given,—the world and himself were about to witness the truth or falsehood of his personal predictions. I know not but that a rabble attended his entrance into the ark, and shouted defiance to his warnings, and taunted him with the necessity he would soon find, of leaving his romantic retreat, and returning to the very same scenes he had been dooming to destruction. But he persevered,—too sensibly persuaded both of the faithfulness of God and the infatuation of mankind. “He entered the ark,” says the historian, “and the Lord *shut him in.*” What a moment must that have been! What a feeling must have succeeded this act of security! “*The Lord shut him in.*” What a new and undefinable sensation must then have absorbed his mind! He had taken his last look of the world and man; he was now,

if we may so speak, sensibly suspended upon Deity. The windows of heaven and the fountains of the deep were opened; the elements descended, and the waters advanced; now, perhaps, numbers of those who had rejected his testimony were heard crowding to the ark, expressing penitence and imploring aid, when it was too late; at length, one by one, the voices were hushed; the water was perceived to prevail,—to destroy each individual as he became too weak to grapple with their force,—till, rising over all, extinguishing for ever their importunity,—diffusing the silence of death,—and lifting the ark from her foundations,—the prophet would feel the increasing necessity of reliance upon God, as he felt left alone amid the ruins of nature, abandoned to the agitated element, in danger of being tossed by contending currents, or dashed upon some yet uncovered elevation.

## SERMON VI.

PRINCIPLES AND LESSONS ILLUSTRATED BY THE  
HISTORY AND FAITH OF NOAH.

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HEB. XI. 7.

*By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is by faith.*

HAVING already attempted the exposition of this passage, by adverting to the cause and circumstances of the deluge, and by illustrating the faith of Noah as connected with that event; we proceed to deduce those general lessons and inferences, which the whole subject seems calculated to suggest.

I. In the first place; we are reminded by this subject of one of the great sources of unbelief



in the facts and doctrines of Divine revelation. Many of these facts are miraculous, and many of the doctrines partake more or less of a mysterious character. Some pretend, that, from this very circumstance, the rejection of both, by them at least, is inevitable. This arises, they affirm, from causes which they cannot control ; over which they have no power ; whose operation involves no responsibility. The necessary laws of the human mind render it incapable, it is said, of admitting what is repugnant to its primitive perceptions ; and subjects distinguished by the above properties are held to be such. In this way, many, we believe, have imposed both upon themselves and others, as if with reluctance they rejected, in consequence of a commanding necessity, a system of principles "worthy of all acceptance." It may be urged, however, *in general*, that reason, legitimately exercised, would seem to expect, in connexion with divine communications, something both of miracle and mystery ;—of mystery, because it might be presumed, that revelation, like nature, would have its ultimate facts, beyond which it is impossible to penetrate ; and that divine ideas conveyed in human language might contract some obscurity from the imperfection of the vehicle :—of miracle, because, admitting the fact of a revelation at all, it is only



by miracle that it can either be imparted or proved ; it is only by something altogether different from our usual experience, that a communication with Deity can be held, or the reality of such communication satisfactorily demonstrated. It would seem, therefore, that it is not in the alleged unreasonableness of either of these that the source of infidelity is to be sought, but in something else, which belongs more to moral disposition than to intellectual capacity.

These observations, bearing upon the elementary facts and principles of our faith, may be illustrated by that particular fact, with which the name of Noah is connected. The kind of illustration to which we refer, is furnished by St. Peter, in a passage which has suggested the remark. Describing certain scoffers and infidels, he represents them as ridiculing the thought of the world's ultimate destruction, and defending their unbelief by referring to the regular operations of nature, which, they assert, have never been disturbed. "Where is the promise of his coming?"—that is, 'Where is the *reasonableness* of such an event ? It has nothing to support it,—nothing to enhance its probability in any thing we see ; it is opposed in fact by the voice of the universe itself ; for, "since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they

were from the beginning of the creation." Seeing then, that the movements of this system have never yet been interrupted,—we have our own experience, and that of antiquity,—the evidence of daily observation,—the resistless demonstration of the senses,—to assure us that they are not likely to be interrupted at all; hence, we cannot *but* reject the predicted occurrence; the necessary laws of the human mind compel our unbelief; we are thus *rationaly incapacitated* for receiving the miraculous absurdity, attempted to be imposed upon our credulous reception.'

Such is the complete sense involved in the language of the men to whom Peter refers. In their own opinion, they could not help believing and disbelieving just as they did; in doing so, they pretended to be following, with philosophic consistency, the simple suggestions of reason and nature. But how does the apostle account for their unbelief? To what does *he* refer this "rational incapacity" to admit the anticipated miracle? "This," says he, "they *WILLINGLY* are ignorant of, that the heavens and the earth were of old, and that the earth which then was, being overflowed with water, perished." "*This they willingly are ignorant of.*" Here is the discovery of a circumstance connected with their argumentative objection, which exposes at once

its inherent weakness, and the moral culpability in which it originated. They argue against the probability of a certain occurrence, by pleading their ignorance of any similar event. The objection is groundless, says the apostle, because it assumes a falsehood,—the very thing they speak of having actually taken place. They profess to be ignorant of it,—that ignorance, however, cannot but be voluntary; this state of the intellect is the result of a criminal determination of the will; the understanding has been perverted by the moral affections; they have forgotten or neglected the means of knowledge; “*they WILLINGLY are ignorant.*” Their sin and their sophistry are seen in this,—they first shut their eyes against evidence by which even *their* minds would have been impressed; they then plead the ignorance arising from the want of it, as necessarily inducing the rejection of the truth; and they preposterously imagine that this ignorance, which occasions the incapacity of belief, constitutes an argumentative vindication of their professed infidelity, when, in fact, *being itself a crime*, it only evinces and aggravates its turpitude.

Such is the explanation of the apostle, and such is the principal cause of most of the infidelity in the world. It is not so much a want, as a willing oblivion, of evidence. There is

voluntary negligence in collecting and considering it, arising from internal opposition to the *thing to be established*. "Men do not like to retain God in their knowledge." They have a moral distaste to the truth itself; and they attempt to justify their unbelief, by referring *that* to the laws of the intellect, which only proceeds from the state of the affections. That this was the case with the men spoken of by Peter, is obvious from what has been remarked; and they are described, probably, for the very purpose of furnishing an illustration of the seminal principle of all unbelief. They *argued*, indeed, as if the operations of the intellect were alone encouraged, and as if, over them, Reason, in all her power and purity, presided. Their whole argument, however, it is worthy observation, proceeds upon *two* very illogical assumptions. The *one* has already been considered. Apart from its moral character, (the light in which it is viewed by the apostle, and in which, hitherto, we have exclusively regarded it,) it consists in taking that for granted which is not proved. The *other* consists in employing a *kind* of argument unsuitable to the subject. Admit the truth of their objection, — admit "that all things have continued as they were from the beginning of the world," and *what then?* Is that sufficient to prove that they

will for ever remain so? Is nothing to occur in the universe but what has occurred before? Is God never to do but what he *has* done? If this be a principle with Him, it must always have been such; it must have been such before creation began; and if it had, it would have prevented it, for there was then no precedent for his forming worlds, as there is now said to be none for his destroying them. The fact is, this was not the point in dispute. The question concerned the truth of a certain testimony. The matter was to be tried, therefore, by the law of evidence, and not by analogical presumptions. The men, announcing the event, did so, they affirmed, in obedience to the command of God; they pretended to hold with him supernatural intercourse, and they professed to afford satisfactory, because supernatural, proofs of the fact. The point was *to examine these proofs*,—to investigate their reality and force,—and then to determine the credibility of the announcement. This was the only legitimate and logical course. The mode of argument actually adopted, would do in opposing the opinions of a philosopher, but not in opposing those of an apostle. The one is a *speculation*, the other is *testimony*. The one, therefore, we may reject from speculative presumptions; the other we may be compelled to acknowledge even in spite of them.



These distinctions, important as they unquestionably are, were forgotten by the persons described by St. Peter. They were forgotten by them in relation to a subject which they disliked, and which came with pretensions to divine authority. Had it been something gratifying to "men of corrupt minds," their reasonings would probably have been sounder; or had they been investigating a matter in a court of justice, their acuteness would hardly have suffered so degrading an eclipse. In either case they would have perceived that the subject was not to be dismissed, because nothing similar had been submitted to them before; but they would have tried the matter on its own merits, examined the evidence produced in its support, and arrived at a just conclusion from employing an appropriate mode of inquiry. This they would have done in secular concerns, because in these there was nothing to excite their moral feeling, and to lead it to pervert and bias the judgment. But this there *is* in the truth of God. The hostility of the heart to spiritual purity will often betray itself, by leading men to impose upon themselves in the *rational* and *philosophical* manner described by the apostle! It will permit them to employ such unfairness of argument, or to be taken captive by such flimsy sophistry, as, in relation to other subjects, they

would utterly ridicule and reject. It is the state of the heart, then, that needs most to be altered. When the moral feelings are changed,—when the heart is impressed with the importance, and sincerely desirous of being governed by moral truth,—then is the strongest intrenchment of infidelity demolished, and the surest foundation laid for cordial belief: for, “whoever wishes to do the will of my Father, shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”

II. From the fact of the deluge we may learn how to conceive aright of the Divine character.

There is a tendency in some persons to indulge in very partial speculations on the Divine character. They are not disposed to contemplate the whole of it. They are satisfied with a very defective induction, when professing to collect the particulars and to interpret the facts by which it is displayed. In surveying the universe, for instance, they select the grand and the beautiful, the lovely and the fair; they are enraptured with all that enkindles genius or delights sensibility; rising from these to the contemplation of the Creator, they invest him with exclusively corresponding attributes; they think of nothing but the wisdom, the benignity, and the tenderness, which such scenes appear



to illustrate; and thus they form for themselves the idea of a being distinguished by a few attractive perfections, whose character may excite admiration or impart pleasure, but includes nothing to agitate or awe. The same principle, which leads them to overlook one class of phenomena in the universe, by which the character of Deity is drawn, also leads them to overlook one class of representations in the Bible, by which the character of Deity is described. Fixing upon the passages which speak of his love, his compassion and his mercy,—which attribute to him the tenderness of a father or the munificence of a prince,—they forget the other passages which speak of the claims of the sovereign and the functions of the judge,—which exhibit his determined opposition to evil, and threaten the outpouring of the vials of wrath. By this systematic oblivion of one half of the Divine character, most delusive and dangerous notions are engendered. The men are pleased with the creation of their own fancy. It presents them with a God of such placid perfections that no excess of iniquity seems sufficient to rouse him. His attributes are exclusively adapted to sooth and to tranquillize. They impart consolation to affliction and confidence to guilt. Guilt, indeed, is hardly associated with humanity at all; error, frailty, or misfortune, are the terms

by which sin is described; it would be shocking to think it could be severely punished; a little physical suffering, or an expression of *elegant* regret, seems capable of blotting it out for ever!

Now, these partial and dangerous delineations of Deity are seen to be such, when we look at the moral aspect of the deluge. He that could intentionally destroy all flesh because all flesh had corrupted its way, was no palliating observer of iniquity,—no gentle excuser of crime. *This* God must have been very different from the amiable idol of a false philosophy or a deceitful sentimentalism. There must have been something of the awful about him as well as the attractive. Something of the strong and the stern of character, as well as the indulgent. Something that regarded sin with severity, and allowed not that his creatures should for ever trifle with the commands of his law or the expressions of his love. All the fascinating descriptions of the poet,—all the flimsy reasonings of the pretended philosopher,—all the partial expositions of the semi-theologian,—all these are falsified by the fact, which speaks of a period in the history of our world when the very forbearance of God was exhausted,—when his Spirit actually ceased to strive with man.

It is thus that the circumstance of the deluge displays a part of the Divine character, which

men are disposed to overlook, and recalls us to the just consideration of the whole. The phenomena of nature and the economy of Providence, though insufficient as exclusive and independent teachers, may both be observed beautifully to illustrate the various discoveries of holy writ. Their respective appearances, harmonizing with each other, constitute a comment on the "sayings of God," embodying, as it were, in palpable facts, the abstract statements of inspired men. No class either of the facts or the statements can be consistently or safely neglected. The most appalling may be salutary; for, though they may dissipate the dreams of delusive and indulgent systems, they prevent our reposing on a "broken reed," and impel us to flee to the only foundation. They keep us from imagining that the moral concerns of God's great empire are conducted upon principles so indiscriminately benevolent, and therefore so unjust, as, if adopted in human governments, would render them at once useless and contemptible.

III. He who has already once judged and condemned mankind, may do so again.

We have found, by looking at the fact of the deluge, that the attributes of the great Being include the dreadful as well as the benignant;

that his benevolence is not a weak and blind partiality which overlooks moral distinctions, and the extent of which is so literally infinite, that its gifts can never be withheld; but that it is a holy and just principle, which can actually approve the denunciations of vengeance, and sanction the outpouring of the vials of wrath. All this we have seen to be involved in the fact before us. It is expressed, indeed, in words, in various scriptural representations of God. But these representations are here embodied and realized. We see God to *be* what he says he *is*—how he *acts* in his conduct as he speaks in his communications. But what God *is*, he must ever be. What his perfections permit him to do once, he may do again. What they suggest and sanction under certain circumstances, they may always sanction when such circumstances recur. He, therefore, who punished an impenitent world, *may* punish an impenitent man. He who has already visited the depravity of one age, *may* visit the depravity of another. He is still the same God. His character still possesses the same perfection; it still retains its harmony of attributes. His abhorrence of evil is as inveterate as ever; his threatenings against it,—his declarations of “a judgment to come,”—his descriptions of “the day of the revelation of wrath,”—are as loud,—

as intelligible,—as distinct; and therefore, it becomes us to listen to every warning he sends; to be persuaded by “the terrors of the Lord;” and to flee from the anticipated vengeance, which will as assuredly overwhelm the unbelieving and impenitent, as the former flood the disobedient spirits, “who repented not at the preaching of Noah.”

In urging, my brethren, this practical lesson from the present subject, we are borne out by apostolical authority. It is the very sentiment which St. Peter enforces by referring to this and similar events. Reasoning from the unchangeable perfections, the necessary and eternal consistency of the Supreme Being,—“*if*,” says he, “God spared not the angels that sinned; *if* he spared not the old world; if he spared not the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah;—*then* doth he still know how to reserve the ungodly to the day of judgment to be punished.” And, in the next chapter of the same epistle, he explicitly states the fact of God’s intending to do, what he here says he consistently might. “The heavens and the earth are kept in store, reserved unto fire, against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” These, my brethren, are dreadful declarations. They describe a judgment to come, more terrible than the judgment that is past; a period for which

we should ever be prepared,—of which we should seem to stand in incessant expectation. “For the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and all that is therein, shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?”—The certainty of the event, and the *uncertainty* of the time of its appearance, should concur to quicken watchfulness and prayer. It ought not to be with us as our Lord describes it to have been with those who formerly perished; “when in the days of Noah, the people ate and drank, married and were given in marriage, and wist not till the flood came and took them all away.” We, who are so repeatedly reminded of the “coming of the Lord,” ought to be prepared for the Lord’s appearance. He comes virtually to each of us at death. The material universe may remain for ages, but *our* destiny will shortly be determined, “The judge is *near*, even at the door.” “The end of all things is *at hand*.” “The day *approacheth*.” “The coming of the Lord draweth *nigh*.” “Wherefore, give all diligence, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”



IV. In connexion with this awful representation of God, it becomes us to notice the consolatory and encouraging indications, which the present history includes. It is true, God can do with sinners as a judge, what he has already done in the same character. As he has destroyed the world by one element, he can destroy it by another. As he has once poured out the fury of his anger, he can, and he will, pour it out again. All this is true. But it is also true, that, as he provided a refuge in the one case, so has he also provided a refuge in the other;—and one far more ample and capacious,—one that could contain a world, if a world could be persuaded to enter it. It is true, an inundation more dreadful than the last, is ready to rush upon the earth; but means of escape are prepared commensurate with the awful emergency. We are addressed from heaven by a greater than Noah; we are invited to accept of a greater salvation. “The ark of the covenant,” containing, so to speak, the eternal purposes of redeeming love, is sufficient to secure the safety of the species. “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.” The invitation hath gone forth to the whole world, beseeching all, “without money and without price,” to come, and to accept of a free and an adequate salvation. There is no reason for alarm, from



reflecting upon those attributes of God, which present such an aspect of severity towards evil and its agents. These have been consulted in the provision which he has made. Their claims have been admitted and their honour sustained. The insulted majesty of the law has been satisfied, and the *whole* of the Divine character so consistently regarded, that “God can be *just*, and the *justifier* of him that believeth in Jesus.” “Now then we are ambassadors for God, as though God did beseech men by us, we pray men, in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

V. In connexion with this last remark, there is another, and a kindred consideration, which we shall do well repeatedly to weigh. Peter, in his first epistle, speaks of the longsuffering of God, waiting in the time of Noah while the ark was preparing; his Spirit continuing to “strive” even after the dreadful denunciation was uttered, as if lingering to see whether any impression would be made upon the obduracy of man. In his second epistle the apostle teaches us, that we ought to regard the continuance of nature and the delay of judgment, as another manifestation of the Divine forbearance, and

another mode of expressing anxiety to save. "All things continue as they were;"—yet, "the Lord is not slack concerning his promise;—but he is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."—Wherefore, "account, that the longsuffering of the Lord is salvation,"—that is to say,—account, that it is intended to afford you facilities for securing it; to furnish you with opportunities of "laying hold on eternal life." Account every day added to your existence, as a fresh messenger from the mercy-seat,—a new and intenser invitation to believe and live,—an additional evidence, that, in the mind of God, there are thoughts and purposes of love, the eternal benefit of which may be yours. Had he no such purposes with respect to our world, he would terminate its history and his forbearance together. While the world continues then, account it salvation. While death is delayed, feel and act as those who are favoured with the means of securing it. So long as the heart is susceptible of a desire after God,—and so long as his paternal forbearance multiplies the opportunities in which it may be expressed; so long have we proofs and assurances, that the merciful refuge from the coming wrath is still open, and still may be entered.

VI. It seems hardly necessary to remark that, supposing we participate the faith of Noah, we must stand prepared for trials like his. We may not be called to any great work ; we may not be exposed like him to universal observation, and have such severe demands made upon our feelings ; but, in bearing our daily testimony for God ; in pursuing “ the work of faith and the labour of love,” as generally allotted to every believer ; we shall find frequent necessity for energetic exertion of the sacred principle. In proportion, indeed, to the sphere we are to fill, or the greatness of the duties awaiting us in providence ; in that proportion we may expect to be “ tried ” as a necessary discipline to fit us for the work. The painful and incessant trials of the patriarch, previous to the last and greatest exercise of his faith, were probably requisite, apart from all their *immediate* uses, to prepare him for the dreary night of seclusion, he was soon to pass amid the ruins of a world. In this light we shall find it profitable to regard frequent disappointments or protracted affliction. There may be a crisis before us we do not anticipate, but for which we should not be otherwise prepared. It may not be great in itself, but it may be great *to us* ; it may be more than our present principle could encounter ; and, therefore, he who knoweth our faith as

well as our frame, may be mercifully leading us through a course of exertion, that shall enable us to pass it with safety and success. Faith, as a practical principle, is progressive. It admits of degrees. It is capable of growth. It is strengthened by trial, as the oak of the forest is rooted by the storm. At first it may be like the slender shoot, which the slightest breath may cause to vibrate; it may ultimately become, by gradual advances, sufficient to withstand the force of the tempest. In the early stages of the divine life, comparatively slight trials may be sustained with difficulty; by the continued repetition and conquest of these, we may attain such a spiritual robustness and vigour, as to be able to employ, with corresponding confidence, what we may almost suppose was the frequent song of Noah and his sons. *"We will not fear though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea: though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof."*

VII. Lastly, Let us rejoice in contrasting the consequences which are to follow the conflagration with those which resulted from the deluge.

The deluge probably swept from our world many of the beauties of the primitive earth; the conflagration will restore them with super-

added magnificence. The world, when the antediluvians possessed it, remained as it had been made. The very forms and appearances which met the eye of the Creator when he expressed his paternal complacency, lay in extended and beautiful perspective before them. Nothing had intervened between them and the creation. There could not be, therefore, *then, all* the physical indications of the apostasy which are visible now. The destruction of the earth, by means which broke its parts and mingled its elements, left upon it, in spite of all the sublimity and beauty that revived, fearful marks of some terrible convulsion. It completed the ruin which sin had begun upon the species; and impressed proofs of the fall upon the world itself, not comprehended within the primitive curse. The temple which God had originally erected stood before; and stood as he had made it,—still retaining its form and dimensions,—though filled with weeds, forsaken by the divinity, and covered with much that disfigured its exquisite architecture. But now, the temple is overturned; its arches and pillars are broken; and its materials are thrown together in confused masses, as if by the force of an explosion or an earthquake. The feelings of Noah on returning to the light of day and the scenery of earth, were probably like those afterwards felt

by the "ancient men" who returned from the captivity, and who wept on beholding the second temple, while their children hailed it with enthusiastic acclamations.—Such is the impression naturally made upon the mind, by reflecting on the physical consequences of the deluge. It produced, as it were, a sort of natural harmony between man and his abode; it prepared a fallen world for a fallen species;—for the species continued unchanged; it retained and perpetuated in the new world, the same moral characteristics which had distinguished it before. As men increased upon the earth, the old forms of depravity re-appeared; scenes of impiety, corruption, and violence were again repeated.—But, how different from all this, are the scriptural anticipations, respecting the consequences of the coming judgment. They speak of the restitution of all things; their recovery from thralldom; the regeneration of nature; the commencement of a perfectly virtuous and eternal age. "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise; the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth and all that is therein shall be burned up;—nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." We anticipate a renovated universe; the fire shall only purify it from the grossnesses, and free

it from the defects, of its present constitution. The earth is represented as now sustaining the divine anathema ; in consequence of this, “ the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God.” But in its next state “ there will be no more curse ;” the groans of nature are to terminate ; the anathema to be withdrawn ; and a new world is to arise from the ashes of this, which shall far transcend even the primitive earth, in the variety and grandeur of its physical appearances. And, from this last crisis, man too is to emerge renovated and restored ; his nature is to be changed and perfected with his abode ; a ransomed, renewed, and “ righteous ” church, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, are to occupy a world renewed like themselves. Thus, (to return to our former figure,) the Temple originally raised,—and at present in ruins,—shall be raised again ;—raised with greater splendour and for higher purposes. Every thing that pollutes it shall perish. The altar shall be replenished with incomparable gifts. The ample spaces shall be filled with sinless worshippers. And the Divinity shall return,—shall make it his eternal resting place ;—pervade it by his presence, and embellish it with his glory.



## SERMON VII.

### THE FIRST TRIAL OF ABRAHAM.

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HEB. XI. 8.

*By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.*

THE persons whose faith we have attempted hitherto to illustrate, lived, so to speak, not only in a former age, but in a former world. They existed previous to the deluge. They were conspicuous for their virtue amidst those portions of the species, whose depravity and crime gradually accumulating, at length so insolently insulted heaven, as to occasion the infliction of that tremendous catastrophe. By this event the whole frame of nature was convulsed. Much of the grand and the beautiful in the scenery of the primitive earth,—much that had at first excited the song, and perhaps

the surprise, of superior natures,—and much that had prompted the expression and raised the rapture of patriarchal piety,—unquestionably perished. The scourge, however, was gradually removed. The waters returned to their place. Hills and valleys were formed and fertilized. The surface of the earth assumed its present aspect and appearances, and again became habitable by man. Man was continued as before. He sustained no injury; his nature underwent no change. The descendants of the second father of mankind were in all respects the same as those of the first, though, in one sense, the world upon which they looked was not. The same material, indeed, exists now, as existed in the days of the antediluvians; but its modifications and phenomena are probably different. Mountains and rivers familiar to *them*, endeared to their associations, and perhaps celebrated in song, are no longer to be seen; the primitive creation has been swept away, and features are impressed upon the globe which they never knew. With those persons, however, who are now to become the objects of our attention, it is otherwise. *They* occupied the very same world with ourselves. The countries in which they resided are still known by the same names. The mountains over which they travelled, or upon which they worshipped, are

mountains still. The very same objects which met *their* observation, are presented to ours. The very manners and customs which they observed or practised, continue, without variation, among the inhabitants of those plains where they pitched their tents or erected their altars. This circumstance seems to give them an additional claim on our regard. It brings them into a closer contact with ourselves. It augments our interest by almost inspiring the persuasion that there is a nearer alliance between them and us. They are not divided from our sympathy by that mysterious Visitation, that came like the Destroyer of one world and the Maker of another. They existed upon *our* side of that curtain that fell on a devoted species. Their history is extended by such minute particulars, as awaken sensibility by acquainting us with their private and domestic concerns; by describing occurrences with which we are daily conversant, or anxieties which we all habitually feel.

This introductory remark has suggested a reflection, which it may not be improper, perhaps, to embody in words. We have been adverting to the fact of a former world. Has it never occurred to you how little information respecting the inhabitants of that world survived its destruction? It lasted, you remember, nearly

two thousand years; its population was great; the arts and sciences were carried to considerable perfection; there were many eminent and illustrious individuals, "men of renown," distinguished for their genius, their bravery, and their exploits; they were often, it is probable, celebrated as "immortal," just as persons similarly distinguished are celebrated now. But where are they? "What was their name, or what was their son's name, if thou canst tell?" Where was their "immortality" when the Eternal God "came forth from his place," determined to destroy the theatre of their fame, and to cover the nations with confusion? Nothing has survived to excite *our* wonder, to tell us what they were, or what they achieved. The history of the whole two thousand years is contained in a very brief narrative; a few names have been preserved from the general wreck; but these, we imagine, are *not* the names of the men who were the objects of popular idolatry, and the proud expectants of immortal remembrance. No; the memory of such men perished with the world within which they had confined all their affections; the names of a few others survive, who were ridiculed or despised by their corrupted contemporaries, but who were ultimately honoured by that Being in whom they confided, and for whom they lived. And thus,

my brethren, will it be with the world that now is, as it formerly was with that which preceded it. "The righteous," and the righteous only, "shall be had in everlasting remembrance." The wicked are reserved to "shame and everlasting contempt." Many who are now celebrated as "immortal," and who have received the honours and the acclamations of society, are only, with all this, passing along a splendid path to ultimate forgetfulness: while those, however obscure, who are "rich in faith," have their names written "in the Lamb's book of life," and are heirs of "the glory, honour, and immortality" which are to be conferred "at the revelation of Jesus Christ." "*The world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*"

From these general observations, however, we advance to the mention of that celebrated man, whose life of faith is now to become to us the subject of remark and the source of instruction. The name of Abraham is singularly distinguished in the annals of the species. His "call" constitutes an epoch in the history of the world. He is regarded with equal respect by different nations, and by the recipients of different and contending creeds. The Arab and the Jew alike revere him as their "father by the flesh;" the Christian venerates him as the "father of

the faithful;" while the Mahometan cherishes his memory as the "friend of God." The traditions respecting him, preserved in the works of ancient writers, are curious and remarkable. They speak not only of his piety, but of his endowments and talents. They celebrate his learning, his wisdom, his eloquence, and his bravery. He is not only considered as the first who rejected idolatry, and who worshipped Jehovah the only God; but he is said to have possessed a masculine intellect, and such powers of persuasion as suited a reformer. The Egyptians are represented as indebted to him for arithmetic and astronomy, and for certain communications respecting the principles of morality and the nature of religion. Among the Chaldeans many traditions were preserved of his sagacity, his virtue, and his skill in the celestial science. The inhabitants of Damascus reported that he had once come with an army, taken their city, and reigned as a monarch. These and similar traditionary testimonies, whether they are regarded as exaggerations of fact, or as entirely fabulous, all tend, you observe, to one point. They evince that *he* was no ordinary man of whom such things *could* be said, and respecting whom they were remembered and believed for so many ages. To the authentic and scriptural account of this eminent individual, we are now



to turn, in search of that instruction which the Divine Spirit intended it to convey. "*Whatever* was written aforetime was written for our learning;" no part of scripture is superfluous or useless; none was given merely to impart pleasure or to gratify curiosity; all was designed for higher purposes; from every part, whether prophecy, precept, doctrine, or narrative, the disciple may derive some assistance, and be enabled "to perfect holiness in the fear of God."

Permit me to remind you that the object of the apostle is to testify to the *faith* of the persons whom he mentions. This is the one idea which, in the present connexion of his argument, he attaches to the name of each individual as he records it; and it is to *this* that our attention is to be principally directed. It is not our design to take a review of all the events that occurred in the history of these distinguished men; but of those in which faith was conspicuous,—in which it was required, displayed, and confirmed. In some, indeed, a high degree of the principle was in constant requisition, as their circumstances demanded its incessant activity. In others, though its exercise was no doubt habitual, yet its proof is confined to a single recorded act in the history of the church. In the case of Abraham, his whole life was a life of faith; yet were there *four occasions* on which



was required from him signal evidence of its firmness and vigour. The first, to which the present discourse will be devoted, is generally denominated the "call of Abraham," and is specifically mentioned by the apostle in the eighth verse of this chapter. "*By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.*"

## II.

Abraham was a descendant of Shem, one of the sons of Noah; he was the tenth, in a direct line, from the second father of the world, and was born about three hundred and fifty years after the deluge. By that time men had extensively multiplied, and had become, in proportion as they increased, ignorant and idolatrous. The principles and institutions of the primitive faith were soon generally forgotten. They were first debased, and then supplanted, by absurd notions and impious observances. They were too simple to satisfy a depraved and corrupted nature. Losing, by the fall, the capacity of refined spiritual perception, man became gross equally in his intellect and his heart. He required something sensible as the object of adoration and the basis of faith. The sublime conceptions

of the blessed God, which occupied, we may suppose, the mind of Adam, were soon dissipated and lost, leaving his apostate descendants to the degrading ideas, which an injured and a fallible reason fabricated for itself. Hence, idolatry, in one form or other, soon became universal. It was diversified by the genius and character of the worshippers, but still it was idolatry. It might be the lofty and poetic enthusiasm that adored the essential element of fire, as the purest representation of the supreme source of vitality and knowledge. Or it might be a lower form of the same superstition, leading to the worship of the sun and moon, and the various lights and luminaries of heaven. Or it might be the veneration of separate human virtues, embodied in the forms of manly excellence and female perfection. Or it might be the stupid and grovelling imbecility of minds, that could find an object of worship in "fourfooted beasts and creeping things." It might be any, or all of these, but still it was idolatry. It indicated a criminal perversion of feeling and intellect, and a proportionate departure from the true God. Previous to the call of Abraham various species of idolatry were practised. The most gross and despicable forms did not arise till afterwards; but the more simple and elevated were then common. Whether *Abraham* was ever an

idolater, perhaps it is impossible to say ; but that his ancestors were is expressly asserted by Jehovah himself. In one of his addresses to the Jewish people, he reminded them that he had brought the patriarch "from beyond the river, and from a land in which his fathers had worshipped other Gods."

As in the most depraved period previous to the deluge, God never left himself without a witness ; so he was now determined to select an individual, by whom, and by whose descendants, he might at once preserve a knowledge of religion in the world, and testify against the falsehood and criminality of the surrounding superstition. For this purpose he appeared to Abraham. He commanded him to leave a place, in which idolatry had obtained an entire ascendancy ; and to depart instantly to another he should ultimately inherit. He simply gave the command, adding, indeed, a promise along with it, but imparting no particular information respecting the country to which he directed him. This is the invariable account given of the origin of the Jewish people,—the gracious and sovereign selection of their founder by the Divine Being ; partly, for the direct display of his mercy ; and partly, as the means for the fulfilment of his ultimate purposes towards man. The fact is adverted to by different individuals

in different and successive ages of the church. By Moses and Joshua; by the Levites on the return of the Jews from captivity; and by Stephen when before the Council at Jerusalem. The latter went back, in his address, to this first movement of the Eternal Mind towards their fathers; noticed the most prominent mercies by which it was succeeded in the history of the nation; until the series was consummated by the actual appearance of Messiah "in the flesh." "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I will shew thee."—Such was the explicit and peremptory command; and, like Paul at his conversion, the patriarch "was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." He arose with firmness and promptitude, and, at the call of God, "he went out, *not knowing whither he went.*"

The ignorance thus attributed to Abraham, may be taken to signify, not an absolute ignorance of the point towards which his journey was to be directed; but, of the precise spot,—of the nature of the country, and the character of its inhabitants, and of the actual circumstances that might await him in his journey thither, and in procuring possession. He was, at any rate, to quit the idolatrous community; he was to leave

the land of his fathers; he was decidedly to separate from those with whom he could not associate without sin; and, casting himself on the protection of providence, he was to trust that God whom he thus honoured and obeyed, for another habitation and another home. This he was called to do—and he did it. “He went out, not knowing whither he went;” like Paul, on his journey to Jerusalem, “ignorant of the things that might befall him there;” having no clear intimation of what he was to suffer; but “ready,” for all that could occur, sustained by a principle of unlimited dependence on the Divine power and the Divine veracity.—He was to be “shown,” indeed, another country, but, for any thing *he* could tell, he might have to contend with poverty and want, previous to the ultimate fulfilment of the promise. He *had* to contend with some of the suggestions of sensibility and nature, in leaving the scene of early joys, the companions of social intercourse, and the objects of relative affection: and he *might* have before him trials, many and various, in which their presence would be some alleviation, or from which their power might protect. Appearing as a stranger in the country to which he journeyed, he might find the people inhospitable, deceitful, or ferocious; he might have much to sustain ere he could establish a residence or



participate repose. The weakness of nature might present these and a thousand other possibilities to his mind; they might agitate, or alarm, or damp, for a moment, as they fell upon his heart; but they passed away,—occasioning no failure in his faith, and no delay in his obedience. He had heard the command; he saw the duty; he felt the obligation; he knew the promise: he *could* trust the faithfulness of God; he *ought* to follow the guidance of providence; he *would* do it, whatever might obstruct, or whatever await him; and thus,—turning away from scenes among which it was dangerous to linger,—“*by faith, he went out, not knowing whither he went.*”

### III.

From this first manifestation of Abraham's faith, and from this portion of his history, we shall now endeavour to deduce two or three topics of instructive observation and practical remark.

1. The first remark, suggested by the call of Abraham, seems naturally to be this,—that, the existence of pure religion in our world, depends upon the gracious interposition of God. This will admit both of a general and a particular application. In *general*, we mean to

assert, that, unless God had communicated, after the apostasy, successive revelations of himself, in order to counteract the effects of that apostasy, the world, at this moment, would have been sunk in the most profound ignorance of the Being that made it. What has Reason ever done, at any period, by its unassisted exertions? Nothing. Nay, it has done *worse* than nothing; for, it has been too proud to acknowledge its ignorance, and therefore it has been employed in defending the aberrations of impiety and error, and in investing superstition itself with such decorations, as might diminish its grossness or conceal its deformity. So far as it is possible to ascertain, Reason has never conceived correctly of God. The farther we penetrate into the infancy of nations, we find their faith proportionably pure. It seems as if they retained something like truth, while they continued to trust implicitly to tradition; but that, as soon as ever philosophy presumed to interfere, “professing themselves wise, they became fools.”

Not only has man been proved to be unequal to the *discovery* of truth; but, even when truth has been discovered for him,—when it has been actually revealed and put into his hands,—he has betrayed an utter inability to keep it. He has been unable to preserve it from admixture or



defect. The whole world, more than once, has corrupted its way, positively departing from communicated knowledge. In fact, the history of man, is nothing but the history of successive apostasies. The primitive revelation imparted to Adam, and by him, of course, to his offspring, was soon either corrupted or lost, till scarcely a vestige was correctly retained. By the circumstance of the deluge, religion was restored to something like purity ; it was virtually reformed ; it was reduced to its first and simple elements, and placed in the hands of a few persons, to be preserved and perpetuated by them and their descendants. The very same event, we have seen, occurred. It was again rapidly corrupted and lost. Man, indeed, or at least, society, cannot subsist without a religion. Human nature is essentially religious ; it *must* have something as an object of worship ; and hence, even at the time to which we are advertising, the earth was covered with altars and filled with devotees ;—but they were the shrines and the subjects of idolatrous devotion.—Now, *that* Reason, which had proved insufficient to *preserve* religion, was not likely to *discover* it when lost. That guide, which could not keep us in the path when we were actually there, was not likely to lead us back again after we had wandered. And hence, unless God had interposed,

as in the case of Abraham,—unless, that is to say, he had checked, *by miracle*, the inevitable tendency of our apostate nature; I see not how this world could ever have possessed any thing like a pure or rational religion.

The argument still admits of further illustration. It is confirmed by the history of all ages *subsequent* to the event from which we are deducing it. The tendency to defection was soon developed, in the favoured descendants of Abraham himself. It was seen, not only during their residence in Egypt, where, we may admit, they were dangerously circumstanced; but even afterwards in their own land, where every thing concurred to check its operations. After they had so often witnessed the immediate and miraculous agency of God; after they had received so much knowledge by direct communication; after all this was enshrined and protected, as it were, in written documents and by positive institutions; one really would have supposed it was next to impossible, for this tendency to continue to obtrude itself: and yet, what is their history? nothing but the detail of its successive appearances! It was constantly leading them from the true God; involving them in ignorance, and prompting them to idolatry. It was for this, that themselves and their inheritance were, at length, apparently abandoned;

that they and their "little ones" were taken captive; that Zion, "the perfection of beauty," was burned with fire; and "the place of their fathers' sepulchres" laid waste. But, after their return,—after the reformation and re-establishment of their faith and worship,—after all they had seen, and all they had suffered,—what was the effect?—The very same process was repeated again! The form of the thing was considerably modified, but its character and essence continued unchanged. They were less addicted to palpable idolatry—to the prostration of their bodies before the work of their hands; but they were more abandoned to intellectual offences—to the perversion of the design and spirit of the Record. They became a nation of sophists and Sadducees,—of sanctimonious hypocrites, and "philosophical believers." The Son of God, when he appeared, hardly found faith existing among them, and he pointedly exposed the depth of their degeneracy, when he charged them with "*corrupting the Law by their traditions.*"—The argument may still be illustrated, by adverting to the fate of the New Dispensation. After this was committed to the custody of man; after a more perfect form of truth was imparted, and ampler means for preserving it devised; why, even then, we see the same tendency to abandon or debase it, *re-appearing* in

the Christian Church ! It began to show itself under the very eye of the apostles ; “ the mystery of iniquity did already work ; ” its symptoms soon became palpable and portentous ; they gradually increased, in virulence and number, till, in a subsequent age, the splendid enormity of the “ Man of Sin ” exhibited a monument of moral apostasy, unparalleled, perhaps, in the annals of the universe.

Such, my brethren, have been the *achievements* of the human intellect, under direct and traditional divine assistance. Admirable proof of the sufficiency of Reason ! Glorious demonstration of its claims as a guide ! What *could* have been done by this boasted attribute, if God had never interposed, when it seems to have been employed only to pervert his successive revelations ? — or, if not employed to pervert them, has, at least, proved itself incompetent to their custody. In this fact, we seem to have a stronger proof of its weakness and perversion, than in all that can be urged, from its unsuccessful attempts to rise superior to Gentile superstitions.

We must remark, however, to avoid mistake, that, revelation, though thus uniformly corrupted, has always been of incalculable advantage to man. In every age there have been humble and anxious inquirers, and to them



it has given that certainty, in relation to matters of religious belief, which it is impossible to obtain from any thing besides. The truths and discoveries which man's moral condition requires, are not only such as reason is confessedly incompetent to teach; but, they are such, as, were she even to conjecture, she could never obtain arguments to confirm. They could thus be invested with no authority. They could possess and exert no power. They could not be held with confidence; enforced with decision; or obeyed with any thing like alacrity or promptitude. Let us suppose, for a moment, that a human being should actually conceive a system involving the great principles of accurate theology. In this case, though he might feel their adaptation to his nature and his need, yet, all that could be done by him, would be to *wish* they might be true, or to wish they were *revealed*; for, without this direct miraculous assurance, they never could be *to him*, any thing but a barren, though beautiful speculation. They have been much more than this, however, in every age, to thousands; but, had not God interposed, both to impart them at first and to perpetuate their influence, I see not how, in a world like ours, they could ever even have been *this*.

But the remark admits of a more particular

illustration, to which it will become us for a moment to refer. It may be applied, not only to the existence of religion, as a system in the world, but to the existence of religion as a principle in the heart. "*Who maketh thee to differ ?*" is a question, to which humble faith is never at a loss for a reply. The New Testament invariably speaks of a saving change as the result of Divine agency. If an individual receives the truth, it is because "the Lord opens his heart." If numbers are converted, it is because the word is attended "with the demonstration of the Spirit and of power." If the church is enlarged and believers edified, it is because "God giveth the increase." The whole gospel, in fact, both in its essential elements and its mode of propagation, is so constituted and so conducted, as to be a clear and constant declaration of this truth. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation of our sins." The proclamation of these "glad tidings" is successful only on account of the fulfilment of the promise, "Lo, I am with you." "It is not by might nor by power" inherent in the instrument;—"The treasure is put in earthen vessels" for the very purpose "that the excellency of the power may be seen to be of God."

The gospel, in its mode of operation, is, like its Divine Author, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." As it effectuated its conquests in the first age, so it effectuates them still. It still cometh with the same energy, though not, in all respects, with the same observation. "Who, then, maketh *thee* to differ," my believing brother? Who so adapted the outward means to the inward state of thy mind, and so effectually wrought upon that mind itself, that the word came to thee, "*not* in word only, but also in power?" To whom dost thou refer all this, but to Him whose grace called Abraham from the idolatry of his father's house, and whose grace hath called thee from the depravity or indifference of an ungodly world? In fact, the human mind is still prone to idolatry, and the earth, in one sense, is still full of it. The form of the thing is changed, but the principle is the same. We witness on every side its most palpable exhibitions. We are surrounded, in this very country, denominated "Christian!" with obvious and obtruding manifestations of idolatry; that is, with men giving their supreme affection to something that is not God; something that completely possesses the heart, usurps that place in it which exclusively belongs to God, and which thus constitutes the man as really an idolater, as if he fell before it in the attitude



of adoration. You may see one worshipping his money; another his business; another, reputation; another, power; another his children; another his intellect; another his genius; and all, more or less, their *own will*; that is, virtually putting *themselves* in the place of God, and preferring their own judgment or their own caprice to what *he* prescribes as the matter of duty or the means of advantage. To all this the human heart is prone,—that is, *your* heart,—the heart of each of you; and if any have been taught to overcome its tendencies by a sincere devotion of its affections to God, you will ascribe it, I am persuaded, to that grace, without whose incessant operations in the world, man, with all his knowledge of the gospel itself, would, I verily believe, soon become as really and practically ignorant of revealed truth, as were the idolatrous contemporaries of the “father of the faithful.”

2. The subject may suggest a second remark, respecting the necessity of a decided separation from the world, in persons professing godliness. For want of this, many may be observed to spend years of indecision and disquietude; indulging religious feeling to a certain extent,—an extent sufficient to make them dissatisfied with themselves, but *insufficient* to produce a marked abandonment of habits and society to

which the feeling ought to be opposed. Such persons seem to vibrate, in a manner, between both worlds; they seem alternately attached to each, as the attraction of either happens to be strongest. Neither God nor Mammon will reward so divided a service. These unhappy individuals, therefore, are condemned to feel nothing but the pains peculiar to the followers of both. Let such learn from the example of Abraham to arise and depart; to obey the dictates of conscience as the voice of God; and to hold no parley with those suggestions that would obstruct or limit their devotion to Him.

The fact is, that it is seldom any great sacrifice is to be made by decision in religion. With many it would only be to lose the acquaintance and the approbation of those, whose acquaintance is pernicious and whose approbation is censure. There are some persons so weak and irresolute,—so afraid of ridicule they may never hear—ridicule, too, which would proceed from those whom inwardly they cannot respect,—there are some, who thus pass years of distressing but not very dignified anxiety, alternately excusing or reproaching themselves; determining to be firm, and then falling before the most trivial temptation. Such individuals would do well to consider two or three things. In the first place,—they dread, let us suppose, scorn

or insult; they fear they shall not have strength to sustain the contempt, the sneer, or the laugh of the society from which they must separate; they may be assured, however, that this will be very short, for the world soon forgets *them* who forget *it*; the anticipation is much worse than the reality, and this their wretched indecision increases and prolongs. A very superficial acquaintance with mankind, quite unconnected with religious humility, might teach them that neither business nor pleasure will long be interrupted by people's attention being directed to *them*. Few are so important to others as they suppose themselves to be. The world is too selfish and too busy, too much absorbed in individual interests and personal concerns, to bestow much of either time or attention upon those that leave it. In the second place,—much is gained by prompt and open decision; it is not only best for ourselves, as the most likely means both to certain and rapid conquest; but, even in the mind of irreligious observers, it will generally produce a sentiment of respect. Men of the world are shrewd and just discerners of character. They are acute in the detection of any thing like inconsistency. They are much more disposed to despise the person who professes occasional religious feeling, and yet is easily led to symbolize with them—

selves, than one who openly condemns them, and devotes himself at once to what he professes to approve. They may *hate* such a man, but they cannot *despise* him. In general, however, whatever they may express or *appear* to feel, they will be conscious at times of a real, though silent, admiration of his character. In the third place,—that faith, which resolves and attempts, will expand and strengthen in the effort beyond your conception. God graciously rewards the exercise of the principle by augmenting its power, and making the endeavour to serve him the pledge of success. In the last place,—by perpetual procrastination, you dishonour God. You insult the Divine Majesty, by bringing him into an infamous competition with the world; calculating, so to speak, the aggregate advantage which He and Mammon respectively promise. Such conduct is as preposterous as it is sinful; it is difficult to say whether it be most distinguished for its absurd folly or its impious spirit. One thing, however, is certain,—namely, that so long as you thus act, continuing a conduct directly opposed to that of Abraham, you cannot be his spiritual children, nor “heirs with him of the same promise.”

3. We may take occasion, perhaps, without impropriety, to address a third remark to young persons entering into life. Like Abraham,

Providence may call you from your accustomed society. You may have to go forth into the world, hardly able to conjecture where it may be your lot ultimately to rest. Remember, the very same God who led the patriarch, can lead you; he still continues to exercise the same superintendence, and to afford the same protection. Only, above all things, "seek first the kingdom of God." Acquaint yourselves with the gospel; accept its proposals and imbibe its spirit. Be conscientiously devoted to Him "who died, and rose again, and revived," that he might be "Lord of all." Desire nothing, attempt nothing but what an enlightened conscience can approve; what you can calmly ask the Supreme Power to prosper and to bless. Then may you go with confidence and hope. The consciousness of rectitude will inspire courage; the perception of duty will assist faith; the union of both will produce a tranquil and steady dependence, which will equally restrain anxiety and presumption; which will prompt both to active exertion and filial trust; and which will issue, on either alternative of disappointment or success, in a calm, consistent, and rational repose. "He shall be kept in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon God,"—kept, in either condition, whether there be given to him "poverty or riches;" *both* are trials, and divine "keeping"



is required under both. By starting in life in the way we have recommended, the youthful, whatever their natural character,—whether cool, sanguine, timid, or ambitious,—may learn both how to plan with wisdom, and to execute with steadiness; to enjoy with moderation, or to suffer with dignity. Prosperity will be received as the gift of God, and adversity as the wisely selected discipline of Providence. The latter will be sustained with infinite ease, if it derive no additional weight from internal remorse,—from the conviction that it comes as the consequence of folly,—of time wasted in indolence,—of talents injured by neglect,—of the loss of opportunities which can never return. Such sad and piercing reflections may be avoided by every young man entering into life, if he will enter it with a portion of the faith and feeling of Abraham; if he learn to follow duty wherever it may lead; to act uniformly upon principle; and to leave the event with God.

This is a determination, indeed, which none should forget. In every period of life, we are called to the resolute exercise of principle; sometimes in opposition to the suggestions of sensibility; at others, to the importunity of appetite; and at others, to the prospect of immediate advantage. In every moral question there is but one point for a Christian to

investigate—"What is *duty*?" "Tell me not," he might be supposed to say,—"Tell me not of the danger, the pain, the privations; all this may be true, but I have nothing to do with it; it is not for me to waste the energy of my feeling, in exploring and anticipating these; I shall want it to sustain them when they come, and must not expend it now;—*what is my duty?*" Having ascertained this, he has one course, and only one; he can neither turn back, nor select another; he must enter upon that proposed, and must advance, like Abraham, though he neither know nor can conjecture to what it may conduct him.

4. A fourth and last consideration may direct our minds to that final journey which awaits us all. Abraham was commanded to a country which he had never seen, and of which he had no definite knowledge. My brethren, each of us will soon be called to enter into that region, which is emphatically denominated in scripture the unseen or invisible state: a place from which none of our acquaintance have returned; which is invested with awful and mysterious obscurity; and of which, therefore, we know nothing *definite* either by testimony or experience. We do know, in general, what God has told us, that to those who follow the faith of Abraham, it will prove a far "better" country



than this; one impregnated with the principles of illimitable life,—replenished with sources of exquisite and incomparable joy. But are you so confiding in these declarations, exercising so firm a dependence upon them, that, whenever you are called, you will obey the summons without agitation, terror, or reluctance? Conceive yourselves on the margin of the universe, on the utmost limit of creation,—*behind you* all the opulent arrangements for your present accommodation and pleasure; all the captivating forms of grandeur and beauty; all the warm and familiar realities of the living and moving world:—*before you* the deep, dark, fathomless abyss; the unexplored region, filled with all the mysteries of spiritual existence! Could you abandon the one without regret, and plunge into the other without apprehension? Are you prepared to depart from all that is familiar to all that is unknown? My brethren, this virtually awaits you. To do it will not depend upon your will. The call will come,—the command will be given,—and it *must* be obeyed. Nothing but a participation of Abraham's faith, can enable us to receive it with rational fortitude. Like him, we may then commit ourselves to *His* protection, who can succour with equal ease in life or in death. The prospect of departure will cause no regret, nor the

possibilities beyond it excite apprehension. Faith has the power of imparting to each of us something like the sublime composure of the apostle and the prophet, — “Now am I *ready* to be offered;” “though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for THOU ART WITH ME.”

## SERMON VIII.

THE SECOND TRIAL OF ABRAHAM.

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HEB. XI. 9, 10, 13—16.

*By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. . . . . These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.*

IN our discourse last sabbath, it was observed, that the whole life of Abraham was a life of

faith, but that there were four occasions on which was required from him signal evidence of its firmness and vigour. The first of these occupied our attention at that time; namely, the call he received to depart from the land of his fathers, which, with unhesitating promptitude, he obeyed,—“he went out, not knowing whither he went.” Animated by a desire of universal obedience to the Supreme will; sustained by unlimited confidence in the Supreme protection; and exercising a faith in the Supreme assurances, which the sensibilities of the heart and the prospects of suffering could neither diminish nor distract; we saw this distinguished patriarch abandon the community among which he had resided for seventy-five years, and become a houseless wanderer on the earth.

We are now to follow him into the country which he had been promised as an inheritance, and to observe the permanent operation of that same principle by which he was led to seek it at first. Not only did Abraham, when he was called, “by faith,” go out from Chaldea to Canaan; but, when he was actually there,—actually *in* the land, which it was repeatedly promised he should possess,—he did not possess it,—but, “by faith,” he sojourned even in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling

in tabernacles or tents, without a fixed habitation, anticipating something superior to all temporal property, looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Passing over the eleventh and twelfth verses, which will come to be considered under the *third* proof of Abraham's faith, we connect with the ninth and tenth, the thirteenth to the sixteenth, inclusive. In these, the apostle represents Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob, as having all been distinguished for the same manifestation of faith, as that which we are about to illustrate as the *second* display of the principle in Abraham. They all confessed themselves, even in the promised land, to be but strangers and pilgrims on the earth;—to be looking for something afar off; of which, faith gave them the assurance; for the attainment of which, it supplied the energy; but the enjoyment of which this world was not to witness. "They desired a better country, even an heavenly." And their desire was neither irrational nor vain, "for God had prepared for them a city."

In discoursing from these passages, we shall attempt, in the first place, to explain their import in relation to the patriarchs; and then, to exhibit some of those sentiments, which, as strangers and pilgrims *we* ought to cherish,



being virtually placed in a situation similar to theirs, and "being heirs with them of the same promises."

When Abraham departed from his native country, it was under the promise of being "shown" another, which he was to possess, and his seed after him. The same promise was frequently repeated. Sometimes it was couched in terms referring only to his descendants, and explicitly predicting their previous bondage. But, at others, the Divine voice accosted the patriarch in language like this; "Arise, and look around thee, eastward and westward, and northward and southward, for to *thee*, and to thy seed after thee, will I give this land, for an everlasting possession." The same declarations were made, and nearly in the same words, both to Isaac and Jacob successively; so that they were heirs with Abraham of the same promise, not only by being his descendants, and thus virtually included in him at first; but, by having, in their own persons, actually received a repetition and confirmation of the promises to themselves.

That Abraham, however, did not obtain any actual possessions in the land; that his faith was tried by frequent removals from place to place; that he dwelt in tabernacles or tents, like one only resting for a season; that he thus appeared

as a pilgrim and a stranger, permitted to reside there through courtesy, rather than from acquiring positive rights;—all this is evinced by the history of the man as contained in the book “Genesis,” and by the uniform tradition of his descendants, as recorded in the annals of the nation. Abraham made the acknowledgment himself in one of the most affecting moments of his life. The incident to which I refer, is related with inimitable simplicity and pathos by the sacred historian. “And Sarah died—in the land of Canaan—and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying, *I am a stranger and a sojourner among you*, give me a possession for a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.” There is something deeply affecting in these circumstances of this venerable man. At a time when every secular anxiety seemed like a profanation of the sacredness of his sorrow, he felt that he had no place in which he could deposit the remains over which he wept, until one was purchased from those who could but imperfectly appreciate his character or loss.—The sentiment expressed by Abraham, at this time, respecting his personal condition, was afterwards repeated by David, in the



most public manner. When he had determined to erect a house for the Lord, and for that purpose had collected great treasure, he stood up before his assembled people, and offered a solemn address to Jehovah in which the acknowledgment occurs. "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty, for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all! But, who am I, and what is my people? we are strangers before thee and sojourners, *as were all our fathers*; our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding." The most explicit statement, however, of the patriarch's want of possession is contained in the address of Stephen to the Jewish council of priests and elders. "The God of glory commanded our father Abraham to depart from his country and his kindred;—and he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Charran,—and then removed into the land wherein ye now dwell. *And God gave him none inheritance in it; no, not so much as to set his foot on*; yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession and to his seed after him."

Isaac and Jacob in connexion with Abraham are referred to, as we have already seen, in the

thirteenth and following verses. Very strong and memorable expressions are employed respecting them. "They died in faith;" this includes *two* things;—first, that they retained their faith *till* death, in spite of every trial with which it had to contend; this is religious perseverance. Second, That *in* death itself faith was still exercised, and that not only in respect to the fulfilment of the promises to their offspring, but in respect to their own personal participation of the blessing; this is religious confidence. This they did, it is farther remarked, "not having received the promises;" that is, not having received the *substance* of the promises in a temporal sense; for the promises themselves they had received, as, in the seventeenth verse, Abraham is distinguished by this very circumstance, where he is thus described, "he that had received the promises,"—a designation equally appropriate, in their degree, to Isaac and Jacob, as they also had received direct and explicit divine assurances; yet the actual *material* of them, so to speak, they had not received:—*that* they saw afar off; they looked forwards, penetrated the invisible and the future, and beheld the faithfulness of God giving substantiality and permanence to whatever he had spoken; they interpreted the promises in a higher sense, and in

this sense, "they felt persuaded of them and embraced them ;" their faith was thus both "the perfect persuasion of things not seen, and the confident expectation of things hoped for;" their intellect saw the certainty of all that was said, and their heart reposed upon it with warm and satisfied affection; their whole mind sustained a corresponding relation to the whole truth; their reception of it combined the conviction of reality, with the fervour of appropriate emotion; and thus inspired, by way of natural consequence, a constant composure, and at times, an elevated joy, even while they confessed that "they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

The sentiment thus advanced may be farther confirmed by illustrating the terms of this "confession." To be a "stranger," is to be from home, surrounded by unaccustomed, and, possibly, uncongenial society. To be a "pilgrim," is to be proceeding forward to some ultimate point,—a point, towards which, the wishes tend, and, upon reaching which, the resolution is determined. They, therefore, who say such things, declare plainly that they seek some other country, different from that in which they reside, or through which they pass. But this the patriarchs said. It may be objected, however, that perhaps it was the country

they had left which they were anxious to revisit, and which they looked back upon with a sort of filial anxiety, and a fond patriotic regret. No, it is replied, "if they had been mindful of that, they might have had opportunities to have returned;" instead of which, or instead of availing themselves of these, they invariably manifested unequivocal repugnance to such a measure, either in themselves or their descendants. This was particularly the case with Abraham. When, according to the simplicity of ancient time, he sent his servant to his father's house, to bring from among his relatives a wife for his son, the man inquired, whether, if the person were unwilling to accompany him, Isaac should return to that country and reside there? To this, the patriarch gave a positive and solemn reply, *repeating* his command to augment its impression, and secure its fulfilment. "Beware," said he,—"beware that thou bring not my son thither again. If the woman be not willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from thine oath—only bring not my son thither again." The same sentiments governed his descendants. It was not *that* country which they desired, but a "better," even "an heavenly." They were pilgrims, not merely in relation to Canaan, but to earth and time; they were passing through

both to "an eternal city." God had prepared them such. To this he had an ultimate reference in his promises, and of this they had an ultimate hope in their reception. And this they shall inherit with all their spiritual seed, "who shall come from the east and the west, to sit down with them in the kingdom of heaven." This is certain, and this they expected; God, thus, in the highest sense, shall be faithful to his promises; and hence, though he gave them personally no possessions here, yet "he is not ashamed to be called their God." "Speaking after the manner of men," he might have been "ashamed" of the designation "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," if he had given promises which he never fulfilled, and excited hopes which he never realized; but, since he has not done this,—since the promise, in its temporal sense, *was* substantiated to their posterity, and, in its spiritual sense, will for ever be substantiated to themselves;—since they looked to this highest acceptation of it rather than to the former, and have found their faith followed by its reward;—therefore, God continues the designation which he has no reason to relinquish; they do enjoy an everlasting inheritance and a better country; God is still their God; He describes himself as such,—“and he is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”



## II.

Such seems to be the obvious sense of the text. The whole passage is one of great interest and considerable importance, and involves, perhaps, some principles deserving to be more minutely investigated. Instead, therefore, of suggesting, at present, the practical remarks which were intended for the second part of this discourse, we shall institute a very brief and rapid examination into one or two of these supposed principles.

It appears, from what has been advanced, that, in order to understand the Divine procedure towards Abraham, and to conceive correctly of the patriarch's faith, it is necessary to admit that the promises had a spiritual, as well as a temporal sense; that they had an ultimate relation to a future world, as well as an immediate relation to this. Such a subject might admit of being very largely argued and illustrated. Without, however, pretending to any thing either profound or minute, we shall offer a few remarks, which will not, we trust, be deemed inappropriate or useless.

The allegorical, spiritual, and typical interpretation of certain transactions, declarations, and facts, stated or described in the records of the ancient church, has often been carried to

an injudicious extreme. This has given rise to an indiscriminate condemnation of all expressions whatever, that seem to countenance, in any thing, typical significancy. This conduct, however, is neither religious nor rational. Though the fancy of some interpreters may be too warm, the feeling of other interpreters may be too cold; the one may reason too little, but the other may reason too much; and thus pure scriptural truth may be either missed or abandoned by both. It would certainly seem, one would think, to a person of plain unsophisticated sense, that there are some scriptural facts possessed of a positively typical character, and that there are some prophecies designedly capable of a double acceptation; and, therefore, it *may* be, that there are some promises involving both a temporal and spiritual significance. The passover and the brazen serpent are of the first class. We have their typical character asserted by infallible interpreters, and their import is both obvious and affecting. The prophecies respecting the new heavens and the new earth, in Isaiah, with other similar allusions to the renovation of nature, are, apparently at least, of the second class. They seem to refer, first of all, to the moral restoration of man under the reign of Christ; and then, secondly, as expounded by Peter, to the actual "resti-



tution of all things;" the removal of the curse from the physical universe; the ultimate condition and character of the redeemed; the re-establishment of harmony among God's intelligent offspring; and the reign of eternal order. Hence, with these unquestionable proofs of such a principle in some parts of the word, as gives a passage a meaning both immediate and remote; it certainly appears natural and logical to admit, that, possibly it *may* be, the promises to Abraham, respecting an inheritance in Canaan, instead of being confined to what at first strikes the ear, have an interior sense, and belong to what is termed in the New Testament, "the eternal inheritance of the saints in light."

Again. It will be admitted, that all the dispensations of God to men, had a bearing upon their becoming spiritually fitted for a future world. This world, in all probability, was never intended to be eternal; at least, it could not be intended that man should eternally reside in it. Had he remained innocent and immortal, and had the species, as immortal, uninterruptedly increased, some mode of removal from a place incapable of containing indefinite numbers, must have been afforded. But, however this might be, as soon as man fell and became subject to death, this world lost all its *independent* importance. Henceforth,

the species derived consideration and dignity altogether from the fact of its connexion with another. And their preparation for that other was the object of the Divine solicitude; and the end of God's moral government, from the annunciation of the first promise, through every successive discovery of himself, and in all acts of his general and particular providence, up to this very moment in which we are met to worship Him.

This preparation of the species for their ultimate state could only be secured by the direct interposition of God. It was necessary that He should graciously communicate that knowledge and those means by which it was to be effected. He did this; but in doing it, it seemed meet to Him to convey that revelation gradually,—to unfold it by degrees,—to impart, age after age, additional intimations of his plan and his purposes. It seemed meet to Him, and therefore it was right. But, in conducting it, it does not seem likely that he would ever communicate any thing but what had some influence, more or less direct, in carrying on the process; and, therefore, some connexion, more or less remote, both with that concluding dispensation itself, which crowns and consummates every other, and with that future world for which it was the aim of all to prepare and capacitate the

species. In carrying on this great design, the Divine Spirit, I imagine, never put forth any portion either of his energy or wisdom, which terminated *exclusively* in the concerns of earth. It had not become him to do this. It comported not with the majesty of the Supreme, to come forth from the unapproachable glory,—“to rend the heavens” to commune and converse with man,—without having any purpose or communicating any sentiment, but what was bounded by a word that “passeth away;” and, therefore, it seems antecedently probable, that, if he condescended to regulate the concerns of his people with respect to that world at all, it would be with some reference to that spiritual and higher one, into which it was the glory of his grace, and the splendid determination of his wisdom, ultimately to conduct them.

Had there not been this further reference in the early discoveries of God’s will, to the last Dispensation, and, consequently, to the future world, there never would have been, properly speaking, any thing like “a fulness of time,” when there was a peculiar propriety for that Dispensation to appear. That Dispensation would have been entirely independent of every thing that preceded it. It might have appeared a thousand years sooner or a thousand years later without any disadvantage. But, instead

of this, we know that there was a gradual preparation of the species for the "manifestation of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ." The moral government of the world was pursued upon a plan. That plan bore at once upon this discovery and this preparation. The Supreme Ruler had an object worthy of his wisdom. In his dispensations to the church, there was the constant dependence of one thing upon another; there was succession and advancement; his conduct consisted not of isolated acts; there was a perpetual accumulation of fact on fact and circumstance on circumstance, all pointing to something ultimate—all preparing the way for the "coming of the Lord,"—and between all of which there was such a connexion, that none that followed others could have preceded them, and none that preceded could have followed, without a proportionate derangement of the process, to the completion of which, each, in its order, harmoniously concurred. To one point, one great event, these previous discoveries and facts thus invariably tended; and *from* it, when it was understood, many of them were seen to derive a still farther allusion, even to the remote consequences of that event itself; thus making every thing that had descended from God for the moral benefit of man, point back again to



the eternal return of man to the bosom of God; just as rays of light falling upon a reflecting surface, seem first to display its splendour, and then to rise from it again to seek in their native heaven the source from which they descended.

Once more. In a comparatively rude and ignorant age, before language had advanced much beyond its simplest elements; before words were invented to express abstract and spiritual ideas; and before the general employment of writing to embody them; metaphorical appointments, or facts and occurrences, ordered by supreme wisdom, and intended to convey, by way of allegory, some important knowledge, might be employed with peculiar effect. They possessed the power of communicating and preserving a specific idea, by presenting something palpable to the imagination as well as to the senses; as, even now, we are assisted in our conception of spiritual and intellectual truths, by illustrations appealing to the same faculty, drawn from familiar physical appearances. They would be remembered with a tenacity and a distinctness equal to the ease with which they were understood. And in the case of temporal promises possessing a spiritual sense, or of physical remedies capable of an evangelical application; the temporal fulfilment of the one, and

the physical efficiency of the other, might retain a perpetual use, by presenting the church, in all ages, with an encouragement to faith,—exhibiting a memorial of God's past faithfulness in things that are least,—and thus teaching us to expect, as his honour is more concerned, a display of that faithfulness in things that are greater.

All these general reasonings are corroborated by fact. When we turn to the New Testament, we find passages from the prophecies, and incidents from the history, of the Old, receiving an evangelical or spiritual interpretation, of which, without this, we had not, perhaps, conjectured they were capable. This, probably, we *ought* to have done; for it may be asserted as axiomatic, that, had there been no Saviour, there would have been no Revelation, and hence it is only reasonable and consistent to suppose, that in every part of the scripture, *He* is supreme. This we now know and believe to be the case. To testify of Jesus was the spirit of Prophecy; him, in all his various offices, it was the scope of the Law to prefigure and adumbrate; but still it was necessary for himself, by his Divine power, to open the minds of the disciples, before they could understand what was written concerning his character and work. Even in the case of Abraham, Paul, in his epistle to the Galatians,

refers to the allegorical significancy of some acts of his life, which it is yet difficult, as he himself admits, for us fully to comprehend. With respect, however, to the spiritual bearing of the *promises*, his language is as easily understood as it is clear and explicit. He asserts, and we receive his simple assertion as conclusive, that the assurance of an inheritance to Abraham, involved, and was by the patriarch regarded as involving, the promise of an eternal city "whose builder and maker is God." It was faith, he says, in this ultimate meaning of the promise, that sustained this distinguished believer in his long pilgrimage on earth; it was thus, that, though he acquired no possession in Canaan, "no, not so much as to set his foot upon," he yet saw and acknowledged the faithfulness of God. It was hardly to be supposed, indeed, that he could confine the promise to its literal acceptance. He was not only to possess an "everlasting inheritance," which seems of itself to carry the mind beyond the limits of a fallen and perishing world; but he was to be the father of "many nations;" his seed was to be as the sand of the sea, and as the stars of heaven: for all this countless progeny, however, no place was ever named but one of a very limited extent, which, it was physically impossible *could* contain them. No mention was made of other



countries as included in the inheritance promised to his seed ; and, as Abraham was a person of very vigorous understanding, it seems probable that he might thus arrive, by way of natural argument, to the supposition, at least, of some farther and more exalted application of the promise ; and this rational suggestion would soon be raised into assurance, by the farther evolutions of Providence, and the successive intimations of the Spirit.—Thus, that patriarch who saw the day of Christ afar off and was glad, was also enabled to see the whole of the promises afar off in their celestial acceptation ; to be persuaded of them and to embrace them in this their loftiest sense : and, after a life of faith, to die in the exercise of the same principle ; looking for an abiding city, a habitation and a home, where he and his children should reside together, having all, by the same process, attained personal perfection, and entered on “the inheritance of the saints in light.”

### III.

It would thus seem that a future life was firmly expected by the patriarchs. It is further to be observed, that it became a prevalent sentiment with their posterity, and was connected with the hope of a resurrection from the dead.

Even in the fourteenth chapter of the Book of Job, (who was, perhaps, a descendant of Abraham, though not by Issac,) among many expressions of deep and distressing lamentation over the vanity of man, there occur others, which appear to derive their most consistent interpretation from admitting their allusion to this sentiment. "Man lieth down and riseth not : till the heavens be no more they shall not awake nor be raised out of their sleep ;"—but, when that event does occur, they *shall*. That event, or what is equivalent to it, appears, from other parts of the book, to have been anticipated, and, therefore, the inference may reasonably be considered as implied in the expression. It is necessary, also, to the significancy and force of much that succeeds. Job was now suffering, as he supposed, from the anger of the Almighty ; oppressed by this suffering, and, animated by the prospect of which he had caught, as it were, a glimpse, by thus adverting to what ultimately awaited the species, he immediately and fervently exclaims, "Oh that thou wouldest hide me in the grave ; that thou wouldest keep me secret till thy wrath be past ; that thou wouldest appoint me a set time and remember me !" Here, however, a doubt darkens the prospect. He was not anxious for death, simply as death, but only as a refuge

from pain. The bare possibility of its eternal duration roused his instinctive love of existence, and he exclaimed—"but—if a man die *shall* he live again?"—His knowledge and belief are supposed instantly to supply an *affirmative*, and hence he triumphantly concludes, "Therefore, all the days of my appointed time will I wait (in the grave) till my change come. Thou wilt call, and I shall answer thee; thou wilt have a desire to the work of thy hands."—Another passage, in the same book, is, apparently, an explicit expression of the patriarch's hope. "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand the latter day on the earth; and that, though, after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."—In many of the other books of the Old Testament, there are passages expressive of the faith and feeling of the devout Jew, which refer, with different degrees of explicitness, to the same truth. Indeed, in the case of creatures subject to death, religion, properly so called, could have no existence unless there was the prospect of a future life. Without this there could be nothing like responsibility, and, therefore, nothing like probation. But, this may or may not be the prospect of a *resurrection*. The vague, indefinite idea of some state of consciousness subsequent to death, is sufficient, without the addition of this specific

opinion. This opinion, however, it is, which, we assert, entered into the ancient traditional belief. It seems to be *indicated* in language like this—"the righteous shall have dominion over them in the morning." "I shall be satisfied when I *awake* in thy likeness." In the following it is distinctly *expressed*—"Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to eternal life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." At the time of our Lord's appearance the opinion was almost universal. The very mention, indeed, of a sect distinguished by rejecting it, evinces it to have been so. Further proof is contained in the prompt reply of the sisters of Lazarus to the remark of Christ that "their brother should rise again,"—"We know that he shall rise again, at the resurrection at the last day." The strongest testimony, however, to the general prevalence of the sentiment in the Jewish nation, occurs in two of the speeches of the Apostle Paul. In one of them, he says, "I believe all things which are written in the law and the prophets, and have hope towards God, as they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust." In another, "I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto the fathers; unto which our twelve tribes, instantly

serving God day and night, hope to come; for which hope's sake, I am accused of the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?"—The force of this question, and its direct and important bearing upon our present argument, will be seen, by considering that the resurrection here referred to, as being thought "incredible," was not the general resurrection, but that of Christ; it was for affirming *this*, that Paul was persecuted by those in authority; this, a fact of the very same kind with that which they themselves professed to expect; this, a thing actually in harmony with their own principles; their rejection of it, therefore, was as absurd as it was impious; and hence, the apostle felt in defending it, that, not merely as men, but more especially as *Jews*, he could appeal to their reason as well as to their faith.—The whole passage, indeed, is very remarkable, from its associating the sentiment in question, with the "promise made of God unto the fathers." Whatever might be the specific hope of the fathers themselves, the hope of a "resurrection" became, unquestionably, that of their descendants. *This* was the opinion that seems gradually to have prevailed, and to have been regarded at last as a characteristic part of the national belief.



## IV.

The bearing of the whole of this argument upon the nature and peculiarities of the Evangelical Economy, must be obvious to all. There are persons, who, in interpreting the New Testament, fix, exclusively, upon the doctrine of immortal life, and the assurance of a resurrection from the dead, as if this constituted the glory of the book and the characteristic distinction of the system. That Christianity has established the fact of future existence is readily admitted; but, still we should say, that, if it had done nothing more than this, it would not have done much; and that to *do this*, it was not necessarily required; for, we have seen that the doctrine was understood before Christ appeared, and that at his appearance it had become a confirmed and vulgar expectation. The resurrection of the dead *could* be believed, and *was* believed, independently of the testimony and example of Christ. As the sentiment seems thus to have been entertained from very early ages; as it could easily have been confirmed by a mere proposition from God; as, in fact, it *was* thus, apparently, propagated and encouraged; it seems by no means likely, that the preparatory arrangements of the ancient economy,—the long array of prophets and pro-

mises,—the intense “searching” of inspired seers, into what the spirit of Christ which was in them did signify,—the earnest looking of devout men towards the “desire of all nations,” “the appearance of Christ, and the glory that should follow;”—it seems unlikely, that all this should relate, *merely*, to the more complete developement of a doctrine, which was already known with such clearness, as, in a very great degree, to sustain the hope and invigorate the virtue of those who received it. Therefore, we infer, that there was some *other end* to be answered by the appearance of Christ, superior to his resurrection from the dead; and that his resurrection itself is important, in some *other sense* than that in which it is seen to be the pattern of ours.—As future life is nothing without it be happy; and the discovery of the fact nothing to us, unless we are taught how it may become so; that sacrifice, by which “he, who knew no sin, was made sin for us,”—by which, an ample foundation being laid for the consistent exercise of mercy, hope is imparted to the *guilty* as well as to the dying;—*this* is to us the peculiar and inestimable truth, which invests the gospel with its distinctive character, and makes it a message of “glad tidings of great joy.” Here was the accomplishment of something, which a species of beings, apostate as well



as mortal, emphatically wanted ; something, which could not have been conveyed in a mere proposition as the discovery or confirmation of immortality might have been, but which required the actual appearance of the person “ by whose stripes man was to be healed.”—Moreover, “ As Christ died for our sins, so he rose for our justification.” As he expired a sacrifice, so his resurrection assured us of its sufficiency and acceptance. Thus, in the nature he had assumed and in which he suffered, he was capacitated to enter into “ the holiest of all,” and to “ appear in the presence of God for us.” Hence, his resurrection partakes a new character, and is recommended by more affecting considerations, than when nakedly regarded as the mere type or representative of our own. “ For this cause, then, Christ both died, and rose again, and continues to live,” that he might be the “ Saviour” of them that believe ; “ for, if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”

## SERMON IX.

SENTIMENTS SUITABLE TO STRANGERS AND  
PILGRIMS.

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HEB. XI. 9, 10, 13—16.

*By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. . . . . These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.*

ABRAHAM, as we have seen, was first called to leave his native country, and to journey towards

another, uncertain of what might await him there; and this he did, sustained by a sublime sentiment of perfect confidence in the guidance of God. Then, when he arrived in that land to which he was led, he was called "to sojourn in it as in a strange country," and to dwell in tents as a passing traveller without acquiring actual possessions; and this he did also, animated by the same sentiment expanding and enlarging itself, till it rose superior to the hope of every terrestrial inheritance, and looked "for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

It is farther stated by the apostle, that the immediate descendants of the patriarch, who became "heirs with him of the same promise," became, likewise, heirs with him of the same faith. That they imbibed the same principle to the same extent; interpreted the promises in their most remote and exalted acceptation; unequivocally acknowledged, in the very land secured to them, that they were "strangers and pilgrims on the earth;" and thus "plainly declared" that they sought another country, "even an heavenly." They confessed, observe, not only that they were "strangers and pilgrims" in a *particular land*, but that they were strangers and pilgrims "*on the earth*." They thus excluded every land within the limits of that earth

from affording them a home, and therefore they conveyed, as distinctly as language could convey it, their belief of another world altogether surpassing the present one, to which, at the appointed time, "they should remove away and be at rest."

The antecedent probability that this should be, and the actual proof that it was, the hope and expectation of the patriarchs, were deduced last sabbath morning by a train of argument founded upon the phraseology of the promises themselves; the nature of the Divine Dispensations; the necessity and use of symbolical appointments, and sensible representations of spiritual truth, in the infancy of the church; and very explicit apostolical testimony. We now proceed to the second thing which was then proposed, but which it was found impossible to comprehend in the same discourse,—namely,—to exhibit some of the most important sentiments which, as strangers and pilgrims, *we* ought to cherish, being virtually placed in a situation similar to theirs, and being heirs with them of the same promises.

That the character, professedly sustained by these ancient believers, did not arise from any peculiarity in their situation, that it was not exclusively theirs, but, that it belongs to man as man, and still more emphatically belongs to



believers as such, must be known to every person at all acquainted with the language of scripture. "I am a stranger and sojourner with thee, as all my fathers were," is the devout acknowledgment of David. Lest you should suppose, however, that this was the result of some temporary anguish, the mere passing impression of the sorrow under which he laboured, when he wrote the pathetic composition in which it occurs, suffer me to remind you that he made the very same confession in one of the most glorious moments of his life, when he was surrounded by his assembled nobles and felt secure in the stability of his throne.\* The apostle Peter addresses Christians under the same character, and founds upon it a strong practical appeal; "Dearly beloved, I beseech you *as strangers and pilgrims*, abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul." The constant tendency, indeed, of the New Testament instructions is to support this sentiment in its proper vigour. "Ye are not of the world." "Set your affections on things above." "I leave the world and go to the Father. I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am ye may be also." "The earthly house of

\* See p. 212.

your tabernacle shall be dissolved. But ye have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." "While ye are at home in the body, ye are absent from the Lord." "But the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout,—ye shall appear with him in glory,—ye shall be like him,—ye shall be ever with him." "Therefore, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent,—be always abounding in the work of the Lord,—that ye may have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." Such, my brethren, is the uniform and pervading spirit of whatever was spoken by the Master, or written by his representatives, for the instruction of the Church: sentiments, exhortations, appeals, all presupposing the fact of "our sojourning," like Abraham, "as in a strange country, and our looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and ruler is God."

Before we proceed to the direct specification of those sentiments which strangers and pilgrims ought to cherish, permit me to remark, that the epithets will not apply to all men indiscriminately. There is one class of persons to whom *both* the epithets will apply in their most emphatic acceptance; but there is another class of persons to whom only *one* of them will apply, and that, too, in an inferior sense,—a sense

expressive more of the necessity of nature than of the disposition of the mind. In this world, all men are *sojourners* or *pilgrims*, because all men are fast passing towards the futurity beyond it. But all men are not *strangers* here. There is a large class of men to whom the world is perfectly congenial; who feel nothing strange, nothing unnatural, in any thing about it; who, in the pursuit and the enjoyment of "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," are quite in their element, and just where they wish to be. Now it would be absurd to talk of such men being *strangers* in a world distinguished as the property and the domain of these three instruments of pleasure, beyond which, in one or other of their forms, they never have a wish. They may be strangers among those who are "*not* of the world;" they would be strangers in "heaven," where such will only find their congenial country; but, upon *earth*, they are in the very place, and are surrounded by the very scenes, and can find the very society with which they could be satisfied for ever. And they are *pilgrims*, not because they wish it, but because they must. The laws of nature compel them to advance. There is a fatal and invincible necessity which carries them on, through life and away from it. But so far as feeling is concerned, they



have nothing of the character of the pilgrim about them; the very idea of pilgrimage, if ever it happen to be excited, falls heavily on the heart; every symptom of their progression seems like a punishment; they would rather remain where they are; they desire no better country; this, through which they pass with a most painful rapidity, is sufficient for *them*; and therefore they would willingly take up their eternal abode in it, if they could retain, along with existence, the instruments of earthly indulgence, combined with the undiminished power to employ them.

To men, therefore, as men, the epithets will not apply in their most impressive sense; nor is it to you, under this general character, that we are about to submit the subsequent suggestions; but it is to you as *christian* men, who trust that in some degree they have become partakers of Abraham's faith. Christians are strangers and pilgrims upon earth, not only because they are mortal, and must of necessity depart from it, but because the two following circumstances render them such in the most intense acceptance of the terms. In the *first* place, by the renovation of the heart, their desires and *propensities*, so to speak, have become such, that the world has nothing to offer, either suitable to their nature or adequate to their demands.

They feel a growing repugnance to whatever is merely of the earth. Being "born of God," to use the expressive language of scripture, they have become partakers of a "divine nature," and are thus taught to experience dissatisfaction with every thing that belongs exclusively to the world. Their predominant anxiety is, to be morally conformed to God. They can look to the source of their new life, and sincerely say with the devout Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth whom I desire besides thee?" "I would not live away." "I shall" not "be satisfied" till "I awake in thy likeness." Whatever opposes the acquisition of this, is the source of disquietude; and in the world there is much to oppose it: this opposition, therefore, of the world, to their predominant desire, renders them emphatically "strangers" in the very midst of its population and pursuits.—But, in the *second* place, by this renovation of the heart, the believer is made an "heir" of "the glory which is afterwards to be revealed." He is constituted a "citizen" of "the New Jerusalem." This, henceforth, becomes his hope and his home. It is his father's house, the residence of his holiest kindred, the habitation of his best friends, the place of ultimate repose for all who belong to the same spiritual family with himself. Every

wish, therefore, terminates here. Every feeling expands and enlarges till it touches that desired country, for within that country is contained every thing with which he associates either excellence or joy. Hence it is, that, esteeming it better to be "present with the Lord," than to be "at home in the body," he accounts himself a "pilgrim" passing and pressing onwards, anxious to advance through the appointed path, "to the eternal inheritance of the saints in light."

Let us endeavour, then, in the further prosecution of the discourse, to exhibit some of those sentiments which persons sustaining this character should habitually cultivate.

And first we remark, that they should frequently call to mind, with great seriousness, that they *are* strangers and sojourners here. At first sight, an observation like this may to some appear unnecessary, as it might be supposed that such a fact could never be forgotten. He, however, knows little either of his own heart or the deceitfulness of sin, who is not painfully aware of the contrary. The Supreme Being has not been unmindful of our enjoyment while pursuing the journey which he has set before us. He has given us capacities for exalted and exquisite pleasure. He has filled earth and heaven with forms of surpassing beauty. He has connected the perception of

delight with much that belongs exclusively to the world. And all this, instead of exciting gratitude and animating diligence, the weakness and the depravity of man too frequently turn into an occasion of sin. We are apt to forget the Giver from the very multitude and magnificence of his gifts. We are so alive to immediate impressions, so absorbed at times by all that is seen and sensible, as to be utterly unmindful of those remote and eternal realities, which at last will occupy the whole field of vision, and exclude from our attention every temporary thing. If God were less bountiful, we should probably remember him more. If fewer objects intervened between him and us,—if our pleasures and pursuits were less intense and less diversified, we should, perhaps, more seriously remember the fact of our pilgrimage. So long as we remain here, that nature, “which is of the earth, earthy,” will need to be subdued by active and conscious effort. It is ever aiming at an ascendancy, and, whenever it obtains it, its direct influence is to expel from the thoughts every association of eternity and God. In proportion as these are excluded, shall we display a forgetfulness respecting our actual condition and business in the world. But, if we forget what we are, forget that we are “strangers and pilgrims on the earth,” our character and habits

will become inconsistent with our actual situation. Hence the necessity of often seriously recollecting the fact. It is not enough to make the acknowledgment in words. It should become an abiding sentiment, a regulating feeling. It should be supported in its strength and activity, by frequent meditation and habitual prayer. We should retire at times from the world, leave its engrossing engagements at a distance, penetrate into eternity by the exercise of faith, and thus, by thinking greatly and justly of heaven, we should learn to think correctly of our condition upon earth.

2. If we are engaged in a "pilgrimage" in a strange country, we may learn the necessity of *direction*, in order to advance with security and success. This idea is often suggested by the sacred writers in connexion with the expression of their confidence in the word of God. "Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light unto my path." "Thou wilt guide me by thy counsils, and afterwards receive me to glory." There are two different senses in which this second observation may be viewed. The first refers to a proper knowledge of scriptural truth; the second, to the perception and pursuit of scriptural obedience. In the one sense, it is applicable to men as men; in the other, it pre-eminently belongs to believers.



In the first place, it becomes us, as intelligent beings occupying a peculiar position, to acquire an accurate acquaintance with our condition and circumstances; to ascertain *what* they are, and *why*; how they may be accounted for, and how improved. Why is it that we are strangers and pilgrims *at all*? Why should there be a world, within the universe of the Eternal, where the very beings born in it should not find themselves at home? Why should there be that fearful transition at the end of "the pilgrimage," which we all perfectly know awaits us? Why should it be invested with such incalculable terror? Why is it that so many of our fellow travellers are equally afraid of death and tired of existence?—incapable of relishing the delights of life, and yet reluctant to return to the God that made them? What is to be done in a situation of perplexity like this? Is there no explanation afforded?—no assistance by which we may interpret the appearances of Providence and nature?—by which we may be enabled to form a just estimate of the present scene, and to select the right road to the futurity beyond it? Yes: in the word of God there is every information we can require. There is a full developement of the causes which give that peculiar character to our situation which it is acknowledged to possess. There is an account

of the manner in which man, by becoming guilty, became subject to death; of the method in which he is to be recovered; of the sentiments he is to entertain towards offended Deity; and of the way in which alone he can safely approach Him. In this Book, therefore, there is every thing that can interest the intellect and touch the affections, because there is every thing that is "profitable to *direct*" those who are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

But, in the second place, not only do we need direction as *men*, but as *Christians*. Not only are we to be anxious respecting the fundamental principles of which our faith is to consist; but, when these are felt to be ascertained and established, we need at times to be anxious about the precise way in which duty is to be pursued. There is both speculative truth and practical truth. There is first the question, What am I to do as a sinner? how am I to come before the Lord for mercy? And after this, there is frequently another question, What am I to do as a saint? how am I to act as one that has obtained mercy? how am I to feel and to evince that I am walking in that way in which God would have me to walk? In the course of our Christian pilgrimage, (to return again to the figure of the text,) we often come to perplexed and intricate places, in which



it is extremely difficult to determine in what direction it becomes us to advance. On such occasions our first duty unquestionably is, to look up, with sincerity and fervour, to the Fountain of Wisdom, for such supplies as the emergency may demand. But our second is like unto it, which is, to apply our Reason to the *revelations* of Wisdom, that we may derive from thence an answer to prayer. There are certain great general principles in the written word, applicable to every possible diversity of circumstance; and it is by the just application of these, that we are to ascertain what is the will of God in any particular case. As this is often an important inquiry in the pilgrimage of life, it may not be amiss, perhaps, to mention the following considerations, as likely to be found eminently beneficial, in our attempts to decide upon difficult practical questions.

Fix firmly in your minds, as the foundation of all your reasoning, that you do know what is the will of God in general—namely, *your sanctification*. You do know, whatever else you may be ignorant of, that, at all times and under all circumstances, you are to seek God's glory—that is, the display of his grace in you—by making the pursuit and the augmentation of personal holiness your supreme concern. You know this. You know it to be a plain and

primary truth. This truth, therefore, you are to take, and to apply as a *test*, to every path that opens before you, and to every inducement that presses you to enter it. Will it assist or obstruct my sanctification? Will holiness be promoted or endangered? If obviously and greatly *promoted*, the matter would seem to be determined, as this would ascertain its consistency with what you *know* to be the Divine will. But if there should be *danger*, you will say, how am I to act? This, I imagine, is the great point, for it is only on account of such an apprehension that I can conceive any thing like peculiar practical difficulty to be felt. How you are to act, then, I should reply, will depend upon circumstances. A Christian may certainly be called to occupy a post of great personal hazard; but it will be, very obviously, for the performance of some important duty, or the accomplishment of some act of distinguished benevolence. If neither of these can be pleaded, the dangerous position must be shunned; if they are felt not to be effected, it must be resolutely left. Close examination, in connexion with the application of the test to which we have referred, would appear to be requisite under every form which this enquiry could assume. Its different aspects might perhaps be presented in the following manner. Here

is danger : What is to be obtained by my exposure to it ? If *conscience* reply, “nothing—nothing but personal enjoyment ; perceptions of delight, innocent perhaps in themselves, but which to you might be injurious in their influence, and would soon be difficult to resign ;” in such a case the way is clear. The man *knows* his sanctification is the will of God ; he does *not* know that these indulgences are, which seem so likely to draw away his heart ; nay, in the very fact of that likelihood, he has all the proof he should require of its being his positive duty to avoid them. Again. Here is danger : What is to be obtained by my exposure to it ? If *conscience* reply, “there *is* danger, but, by watching against it you may be safe, and, if so, your position will afford you great facilities for very important benevolent exertion ;” then, it would seem, the man might attempt the trial, because he knows it is the will of God that he should do all possible good to others, consistent with the preservation of his own virtue. But, suppose we go a step farther ; suppose we allow the trial to have actually been attempted, and imagine the man to be comparing the probability of the future with the recollection of the past ; and suppose conscience then says, “whatever may be the power of useful exertion, which your position is supposed to confer, observe,

that the trial *has been* made, and that, too, not only without success, but with personal injury ; you have suffered more in yourself than you have accomplished for others ; the difficulties are conquering *you*, you are not prevailing against *them* to the ultimate accomplishment of the benefit you proposed." In such a case the path of duty would seem equally clear. The man *knows* his sanctification is the will of God ; but he does *not* know that it is the will of God for him to effect *that specific object* which he had previously planned.—In short, in all cases, perhaps the first suggestion of the conscience and judgment may be relied upon, and followed with safety. There is a quick and instinctive sense both of duty and danger in a well regulated mind ; the Christian seldom errs while he promptly obeys it ; he is seldom perplexed, perhaps, till he has silenced, in some degree, this internal monitor ; till he has listened to temptation as well as to conscience ; till his feelings have acquired an improper control, and have given to Reason herself a tongue of sophistry by which to plead their cause, and to divert him from a manly obedience to his purest and primary impulses.

3. As strangers and pilgrims, it will become us to expect privations ; to form very moderate hopes of present satisfaction ; to encumber our-



selves with nothing that may retard our advancement; and to be ready to relinquish, at the call of the Master, many a delightful seclusion, in which we might be glad if it were permitted us to rest.—These are general suggestions which it is not necessary very minutely to illustrate. Their justice is intuitively obvious. The mere annunciation of them, carries along with it a sense of their propriety and a proof of their importance. The character we sustain, or at least *profess* to sustain, founded, as it is, upon the fact of our pursuing a journey through a world in which we expect no permanent possessions, pre-supposes our constant attention to all we have advanced. Our path, too, is beset with diversified danger. “The Ruler of the darkness of this world,” is in arms against us. It becomes us, therefore, to take “the whole armour of God, that we may be able to withstand all the fiery darts of the wicked.” Here, however, is the difficulty,—the putting on the “*whole*” of this armour. We seldom, perhaps, see Christians entirely *un-armed*; but we as seldom see them secured in *every* point. Almost every one neglects some piece, which he finds either inconvenient to wear or difficult to wield. According to the original conformation of the mind, certain parts of the armour are conveniently fitted to us, certain weapons can be

readily used. Assisted by natural feeling as well as stimulated by duty, we can employ them with facility and power. But then, there is some other instrument, in the use of which we find it extremely painful to become proficient; we perhaps give up the endeavour as a hopeless attempt, or throw the weapon away as a cumbersome thing. Such conduct is obviously absurd. It is affording the adversary an immense advantage. However difficult the lesson, we *must* learn to stoop and take it up again, and to persevere in the exercise, till, if possible, we acquire in the use of it dexterity and confidence. . . . . As we proceed in our journey, we meet with many green, refreshing, and beautiful spots,—and God means us to enjoy them; he has given them for this very purpose; they are intended to mitigate the asperities of the way, and to recruit our exhausted vigour. But we are not to make them heaven. However inviting and however welcome, “*they are not our rest*,” we must still remember that there is something ultimate, and something that infinitely surpasses them all.—We should be particularly suspicious I imagine, particularly apprehensive of danger, when we seem to be surrounded by a peculiar combination of pleasurable circumstances. We should “rejoice with trembling.” This is not the place of



reward, but of trial. Whenever the heart, therefore, seems to be filling with delight, derived from relative sources and present possessions, let us fear lest we make an idol of the joy, and cause God to snatch it in his wrath from the bosom of the worshipper. . . . . Our great business ought to be, in relation to all objects, events and circumstances, to extract from them what will enrich us in the highest sense ; what will contribute to that eternal treasure which we can carry with us to any world. How absurd for travellers to accumulate either property or knowledge which can be of no use whither they are proceeding ! which forms no part of the possessions or the pleasures of their paternal land ! The virtues of a renovated mind are alone eternal. Nothing is important, nothing desirable, comparatively speaking, for “strangers and pilgrims on the earth,” but what bears in one way or other upon these,—upon the qualifications it becomes them to possess as heirs of a renovated world. It requires, however, many a painful process of discipline, before we are brought to feel or to acknowledge this, with any thing like practical sincerity. It is so long before we are willing either to be virtuous or happy in any way but our own. We have formed, perhaps, certain notions of the

necessity of such and such things to enable us to attempt with success, what we ought to be ready to attempt at all times, and with any means that God may think fit to afford us; and, because he does not think fit to indulge our passion, our selfishness, or pride, we sit down in sullenness or sloth, spending our powers in indolence or rebellion, while the sun is rising in the heavens, or the thunder gathering in the sky. How much need, my brethren, have all of us to employ that beautiful supplication of the psalmist, "Search me and try me, O God, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."—"Lead me in the way everlasting;" here is a prayer eminently fitted for pilgrims; and there is a corresponding promise, expressed in the form of pious persuasion, "thou *will* shew me the path of life." Hundreds of paths are inviting us to enter, but only one is "a path of life," only one is "a way everlasting." All but this terminate here, and leave those who select them to the awful consequences of a mistaken choice. The way of ambition will terminate; and the way of conquest will terminate; and the way of science will terminate; and the way of pleasure will terminate; *every* way of vice and iniquity will terminate;—but there is a way everlasting; there is a way that

will never terminate; it is apparently interrupted,—it is only in appearance; the soul that steadily pursues it will pursue it for ever; the mind once engaged in pressing forward to a likeness with God, will occupy an eternity in the same pursuit—ever approximating but never approaching; acquisitions eternally increased with a prospect eternally enlarged.

4. The last sentiment we inculcate is this—The propriety of those, who are engaged in the same journey, cherishing an affectionate sympathy in each other. When inhabitants of the same town happen to meet in a distant place, they meet with the cordial glow of kind recognition. Subjects of the same kingdom, meeting in a foreign land, experience emotions of peculiar interest; should either be exposed to danger, the other becomes the defender of his character or person. How much more should those who are “brethren” manifest towards each other reciprocal regard! While passing along the same path, let us candidly judge the conduct, and patiently bear with the infirmities, of each. Let us be ready to assist our associates by the exercise of power or the communication of knowledge. We may at one time alleviate distress, and at another remove perplexity. Some we may introduce to the path, some we may prevent from leaving it; but by

all means let us be careful not to seduce any from the prosecution of its duties; no agony can be equal to that resulting from the consciousness of having trifled with the virtue and endangered the salvation of an immortal soul. . . . . What cordial esteem! what affectionate attentions! what unfeigned courtesy! what faithful friendship! should distinguish those, who, as "heirs together of the grace of life," are advancing in the same path to the same home! "See that ye fall not out by the way," said Joseph to his brethren, founding his admonition on their natural relationship. "Above all things," says Peter, "have fervent charity among yourselves; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous." "Edify one another," says Paul. "Let each man please his neighbour." "Regard not every man his own things merely, but every man also the things of others." "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you."



## SERMON X.

THE THIRD AND FOURTH TRIALS OF ABRAHAM.

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HEB. XI. 11, 12, 17—19.

*Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. . . . By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.*

IN these verses we have a statement of the two remaining trials of Abraham's faith. The last is of most importance. It is described as having constituted, in a peculiar sense, the *test* of the

principle. Abraham is said *to have been tried*, when he was called to offer up Isaac upon the altar, as if all the demands previously made upon his faith, were nothing in comparison with this. The event was followed, also, by the Divine Being announcing, after the manner of men, that he regarded the conduct of the patriarch under it, as affording the highest possible demonstration of his character. The former, however, as it was an actual part of the discipline through which Abraham had to pass, and as it is more than once referred to as such, both in the primitive history and the inspired comment, obviously demands from us specific attention. It should be remembered, too, that "*whatever* was written," or whatever recorded, "by inspiration of God," was given for some wise and holy purpose, and contains in it some blessing, which it is the wisdom of the church to discover and enjoy.

When Abraham was promised, as a personal possession, the land of Canaan, he was also promised a numerous posterity, to whom it should descend. Of this posterity Sarah was to be the mother. That she should have a son was repeatedly announced; and, that from him should gradually arise a great nation, was predicted with equal frequency and explicitness.

Now, that the patriarch received the promise



of Canaan in a spiritual sense, has been abundantly proved; and, therefore, it is at least possible, that he might take the promise of posterity in the same sense: hence, he would regard himself not so much the father of a great family by the flesh, as the spiritual father of all who should imitate his faith. Still, as the promise of an inheritance *had* a temporal sense, and was actually to receive fulfilment upon earth; and, as in that sense also, it was, no doubt, understood by the patriarch: so, whatever might be his anticipations of a spiritual seed, a natural offspring was equally expected. He seems often to have revolved in his mind the various intimations that had been given concerning it. His heart throbbed at times with an unutterable feeling, and his sensibility was ruffled by many a wave of pleasure, as he contemplated the greatness and distinction which seemed prepared to descend, in future ages, upon his favoured posterity.

His faith, however, was tried in two ways. The promise was repeatedly given, but for many years was never fulfilled. This long disappointment seems to have affected him deeply, and to have prompted, at one period, a melancholy appeal to the Divine Being, when he graciously condescended to appear to the patriarch. The voice of Jehovah was heard falling on his ear

with the most animating assurance, “fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward;” but, it appears at first to have fallen in vain. He was absorbed, at the moment, by contemplating the mysterious and solitary circumstances in which he stood; and instead of receiving the annunciation with feelings of elevated joy, his reply indicated that he was suffering from what he regarded as a peculiar calamity. Oh “Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?—Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.” The graciousness of the Almighty was eminently conspicuous in the manner in which he received this complaint. The complaint indicated a want of confidence in the Divine promise, and displayed something like dissatisfaction with the Divine procedure: but, without noticing this, God at once reasserted his intentions respecting him; and, still farther to encourage his faith, commanded him to look upon the heavens, and to observe in the multitude of the stars, the image of his offspring. It seems not improbable, that by this was intended to be conveyed, not merely the idea of number, but of glory, elevation, and magnificence.

A still farther proof, however, was to be given by Abraham of his confidence in the power and

veracity of God. Hitherto the promise had been indefinite as to time, and demanded, so to speak, no pre-eminent exercise of faith, as it involved nothing supernatural. The trial had consisted, simply in the length of the period during which the completion of the promise was deferred, the disappointment of a strong instinct, and the apparent contradiction that seemed to exist, between the ultimate prospects described by the promise, and the actual facts of his own history. At length, however, when a definite period for its accomplishment was fixed, faith of a higher order was demanded. This excited, at first, hesitation and surprise, and something like unbelief, though not really so;—not really so, for, neither of the parties having previously contemplated any thing supernatural, it did not immediately occur to them, and hence their recorded expressions and conduct. When it did occur, we find it was instantly admitted. They remembered the infinitude of the Divine power, and their general view of the attribute came to the assistance of their faith in a specific assurance; and thus the principle which had suffered a sort of momentary obscuration, immediately emerged again and appeared with increased purity and lustre. Of the one it is said, “she judged him faithful, who had promised,”—that is, she judged him “worthy to be

trusted;" she reasoned upon his character and nature, and saw the perfect propriety of placing in his word unlimited dependance. Of the other it is said, still more emphatically, in the Epistle to the Romans, "he considered not"—he would not allow himself to advert to natural impossibility; "he staggered not at the promise of God, through unbelief; and, being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able to perform, he was thus strong in faith, and gave glory to God."

## II.

Upon this part of the history of these two servants of God, we shall only submit to you two observations. The first is respecting her, who is virtually denominated by Peter, the mother of the faithful. That she did exert faith, we have seen; but that this was after some indication of weakness, must unquestionably be admitted. With all the weakness, however, which in this and other instances we are in the habit of attributing to Sarah, it may be worth remarking, that, in the only two places in which she is referred to in the New Testament, she is mentioned with approbation and respect. The apostles pass over her deficiencies, and fix only on those features of



her character, which displayed her humility, faith, and general excellence. Here, then, is a manifestation of the christian spirit, which we, perhaps, would do well to imitate. How very opposite to this is, frequently, the conduct, not to say of men, but of Christians! What a fine faculty some people have for detecting and dilating upon the weaknesses of their brethren—or what they may deem weaknesses, from not having the power, perhaps, to understand or appreciate the character to which they attach! How utterly blind you will find many persons, to all that is good and great in the mind or conduct of a given individual, but most admirably acute, in observing the little shades and spots by which such excellence is occasionally obscured! The moral taste, in these cases, seems to be completely perverted; instead of deriving delight from the perception of moral beauty, it turns away from it, as if its presence were incompatible with pleasure, and finds its most exquisite enjoyment to consist in the contemplation of deformity or defect. Such a state of mind is highly unbecoming the professors of that faith; which inculcates a charity “that thinketh no evil,” “that rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth,” that is to cover, not only a few failings, but even “a multitude of sins.”

The knowledge of this tendency in human nature, to expatiate upon the errors, rather than the excellence, of character and conduct, ought to produce a twofold effect upon us. In the first place; it ought to make us watchful over ourselves, lest *we* give way to it; lest we forget the example of these apostolic men, and are tempted to give prominence and perpetuity to what we should forget rather than remember. In every Christian we may find something to esteem and love,—something, perhaps, even to reprove us,—if we sincerely look for it. Even in an obvious fault committed by a brother, we may discover some palliating circumstance; something, which, to *us*, at least, ought to be an apology, and which it should afford us sincere gratification to observe. In cases where some weakness is seen in connection with unquestionable virtue, let us try to hide the discovery even from ourselves; but, above all things, let us not willingly assist the perspicacity of others. The detection of defects in a character of great and general excellence, will occasion to a benevolent mind, something like sorrow, which will hope that others may not possess the same unfortunate quickness of discernment, and which will express itself in private by intercession and prayer. These are the dispositions which it becomes us to cultivate, rather than



those to which we have been adverting ; which are indulged at the expense of Christian consistency, and yield nothing but a malignant and despicable pleasure.—In the second place ; this subject ought to induce a spirit of *caution* in our general intercourse, lest we afford ground for this tendency in others to operate upon *us*. I do not like to teach the lesson, and yet I know some one must teach it, that young and ingenuous minds must learn occasionally to act with greater reserve, than the heart would naturally dictate, or than human society would demand, if all were what they appear to be, or what they profess. Let the young, then, be admonished not to calculate too largely upon the benevolent judgments of others. You will have to learn to put a restraint upon what may appear some of your best feelings, and to suspect, at times, where you would willingly confide. Many who are forward in actually leading you into occasional or partial improprieties, will be among the first to expose or reprehend them. Instead of imitating the apostles, as in the case of Sarah, and sinking defects in consideration of acknowledged and obvious excellence, they will employ these—these very defects, for which they themselves are partly accountable, as arguments to destroy the reputation, and darken the lustre, of that excellence itself ! I know such

a representation of human nature as this is repugnant to inexperience, but it is just ; if you choose to neglect it, or to laugh at the lessons it would teach, why, of course, you may ; but, you will suffer for it ; and you will probably have its truth forced at last upon your attention, by the most painful and the most mortifying of all demonstrations. We may apply to this subject what is said of our Lord, though without affirming that we use the passage in its primary acceptance, — “ he did not commit himself to them, for he knew what was in man.” There is here much practical wisdom to guide us in our commerce with the world. “ He did not commit himself to them.” He never spake or acted without remembering that tendency of our nature to which we are referring. He never deviated, for a moment, from that high-toned consistency of speech and behaviour, which defied the penetration of the most quick-sighted censoriousness. *He* never made demands upon the charity and candour of others ! he was too well aware of the little of either he should find upon the earth, and, therefore, he was enabled to appeal to those, among whom he had mingled with such wise and scrupulous circumspection, “ *which of you convinceth me of sin ?*”

The next observation may refer to the object

of the Divine proceedings towards Abraham, intended to be accomplished by this trial. Abraham *felt* the trial. By many facts and circumstances recorded respecting him, he is evinced to have been a person of exquisite sensibility. What to *him* were the multitude of his flocks and herds, his opulence and servants? What the respect which came gradually to be paid to him by surrounding princes? He was not ambitious, but he *was* possessed of warm and stirring affections, and his hope had been excited by the promise and the prospect of an object upon which he might pour the whole tide of his nature's tenderness, and from the very sight of which he would derive a thrill of new and incommunicable joy!—yet was he disappointed—disappointed in this very property of his mind in which he was most sensibly alive. He might wonder at times at the fact, and be at a loss on what principle to account for the conduct of Providence. His faith would assure him that there was some principle by which the whole could be explained, though his limited reason was unable to discover it. We, however, by having the whole of his history before us, can perceive, so to speak, some of the secret reasons upon which God acted. At the very moment when he was disappointing the patriarch with respect to his affections as a man,

he was operating on the growth and maturity of his character as a saint. By the very means which delayed his becoming the father of the natural family, he was rendering him the father of the faithful. He could not, in fact, have been the one, without suffering the trial which he did in the sensibilities of the other. It was a necessary part of the process by which he was to be perfected.—Now, it becomes us to remember, that, this may often, in effect, be the case with ourselves. We cannot possibly understand all the reasons of God's dealings towards us. The very thing which we feel to be a trial, may be the only means by which we could be brought to any thing like spiritual maturity. And the very thing which we wish for, with the most restless and passionate solicitude, may just be that thing, which, if it were given, would completely obstruct the progress of holiness within us.—Hence, in reflecting upon the mysterious aspect which the ways of Providence frequently assume, it will be well to recollect, that there must be reasons in the mind of God, perfectly satisfactory to *his* wisdom, and that, therefore, they would be satisfactory to ours, if we knew them;—that these reasons, whatever they are, must certainly have a regard to our good, because they must have a regard to our virtue;—and that, the



time of ignorance and anxiety cannot be long, for, either circumstances will evolve which will plainly interpret the process, which will distinctly teach us *why* we suffered such and such things,—or, if not—if even they remain mysterious to the last, yet, “what we know not now, we shall know hereafter.”

### III.

From these reflections we proceed to the other and last trial of Abraham's faith. The circumstances connected with this were of such an extraordinary nature, and the feelings attending it, in the mind of the patriarch, must have been so deep and agitating, that we have no hope, by any description of ours, to convey an adequate idea either of their variety or intenseness. The account in the book “Genesis,” of this singular transaction, is given with such inimitable simplicity, that it seems like profanation to attempt to describe it in any words but those furnished by scripture. Here permit me to notice one of the peculiarities of the sacred volume. It states facts, but it does not describe feeling. It occasionally informs us of the outward and visible signs of excited emotion, but it does not spend time in any copious delineation of emotion itself. This circumstance

gives to many parts of scripture, a power and a pathos of the most touching and interesting order. The writers never aim at producing effect, or exciting sensibility; they simply detail facts and appearances; but this very absence of all laborious effort and all obvious appeal, goes directly to the heart, and produces, in a mind of unsophisticated feeling, such a throbbing emotion, as language was never able nor even intended to describe. Hence, however, it frequently happens, that when a passage of sacred history, universally felt to be peculiarly affecting, is expanded with the illustrations, and expressed in the language, of a printed or spoken exposition, its whole force and impression appear utterly to evaporate, and we are left wondering how it is, that what had so often impressed us, and from which we expected so much, should have passed away without producing any thing like an adequate or even ordinary interest. But this is easily explained. A preacher, by the exposition of a narrative unusually pathetic, will, in all probability, fail to produce any impression superior to what attends the simple reading of the text; for, all his audience have hearts as well as himself, and to these the inimitable language of scripture has already appealed, and excited, perhaps, all the emotion of which the heart is



capable. That emotion is not to be described, for words cannot describe the operations of sensibility. It is not to be increased, should the preacher attempt it, for all he can say is already in the mind of the hearer; and though the hearer could not, perhaps, express it in words, he can feel and enjoy it in itself. The slow progress of language is outstripped by the rapidity of thought. A single word will open a stream of ideas, or give rise to an instantaneous flow of feeling, which it is luxury to indulge in the silent possession of the soul, but the very charm of which will be destroyed and dissipated by the intrusion of multiplied expression. Every attempt, in fact, of such intrusion will look like an impertinence. It is no wonder, therefore, that we find, at the close of a lengthened exposition of some touching incident, that we never before *felt* so little of its power to affect us, though we never before heard so much effort employed in describing it.

With this preliminary caution, both to myself and you, I will now very briefly notice the last trial of Abraham, which issued in the complete triumph of that faith for which he is so eminently distinguished. The nature and order of our remarks, will be determined by the nature and course of the narrative in Genesis. As our observations proceed, your eye had

better slowly pass over the contents of the twenty-second chapter of that book.

You will do well to notice, in the first place, the *time* when this trial occurred to the patriarch, as indicated by the language of the historian. "It came to pass, after these things, that God did tempt Abraham." "*After these things*,"—after *what* things? Why, after waiting twenty-five years for the fulfilment of the promise; after actually receiving that fulfilment; after parting with one son whom he greatly loved; after the other had arrived at an age approaching maturity, afforded promises of early excellence, and become the object of absorbing affection. After Abraham had received the congratulations of neighbouring chiefs, entered into treaties of amity with them, and seemed to be enjoying something like repose, something like reward for previous suffering. The spirit of a man may sink under any great or protracted affliction, but the effect is incalculably worse, when, after seeming to have recovered, he finds himself thrown back again by an unexpected relapse. The want of any blessing, however much desired, may be borne, at last, without pain: but when we first wait for it till the soul almost faints under hope long deferred; when we then possess it, exult in the enjoyment, and taste the pleasures we had otherwise

not known; and when, after this, it is to be given up, and we are to go back to our former state of entire destitution,—then it is that the mind experiences the pang of hopeless and complicated calamity.

You may observe, too, the shock which the annunciation of the Divine will was likely to produce, both on his affection and his faith. As a father and a saint he was equally tried. The very command is conveyed in such a manner, as to strike, as it proceeded, deeper and deeper, into the sensibilities of the heart. “Abraham, take—thy *son*;—thine *only* son;—*Isaac*;—*whom thou lovest*.” It is allowable to suppose, that when the commencement of this address first fell upon the ear of Abraham, his heart dilated with joy, and his countenance brightened with pleasure. He would naturally imagine that some gracious communication was about to be made respecting this child of promise, this son of his age, this selected pledge of a vast and distinguished progeny. The thought of the parent would, in a moment perhaps, be, that he and his son were to proceed to some place where both were to be favoured with discoveries of the achievements and the glory of that nation to proceed from them, or to receive some communication from “the Father of lights,” that should enlarge their

knowledge, and purify their nature. No. "Go offer him for a burnt offering." "Commit the work to no other hand; prepare thyself to be the priest, while he is the victim." To attempt to describe the effect of this upon the man, would be absurd, because it would be useless. The thing is impossible. We shall only observe, therefore, that his *affection* was tried as Isaac was his *son*; but his *faith* was tried as he was the son of the *promise*. This was he, by whom all the previous assurances of Jehovah respecting his family, on which he had depended for years, were to be fulfilled and substantiated! When he had to part with Ishmael, to part with him merely by sending him away, God condescended to assign a reason and to suggest a motive to promote his obedience, saying, that *he* was not the child of promise, and therefore might be given up; but here there is no reason assigned, no motive suggested; this *is* the child of promise, he who before was represented as a sufficient substitute for the loss of Ishmael; but, if Isaac is to perish, who is to become a substitute for *him*?

The conduct of Abraham under this extraordinary trial is next to be noticed. You can easily imagine how affection might prompt unbelief, and how both might concur, either to retard or frustrate any intention of obedience. He



might doubt, whether it *were* the voice of God; whether he had heard the words aright; whether he had not mistaken their import. He might reason upon the impossibility of the command proceeding from God, both from its opposition to the Divine nature, and its inconsistency with the Divine promise. All this he might certainly do, but it is not said, nor is it insinuated, that he did it. It is rather intimated that he immediately recognized the voice, and prepared for prompt and decided obedience. What an astonishing instance is this, of the power of piety to render every passion and feeling subordinate to duty and to God! Abraham was called, so to speak, to a sacrifice of himself, as well as of his son. He had to subdue some of the strongest sentiments of which the heart is susceptible,—and he *did* subdue them. This, you will observe, is very different from the extinction of the passions; very different from either natural or induced insensibility. If the passions were extinguished, we might be without feeling, and therefore in trial we should be without pain; or rather, trial itself would be impossible. But to retain the passions, and yet to subdue them; to feel that the affections may be cultivated, and their pleasures approved, and yet to preserve them subordinate to duty, or, at the command of God, to relinquish the objects to

which they cling with intense pertinacity,—this is religion; it is to be assimilated to Him whose soul was exquisitely susceptible, but who calmly said, under accumulated suffering, “If this cup may not pass from me,—thy will be done.”

Abraham instantly prepared for his journey. And here there are two circumstances from which instruction may be drawn. The first is, Early the very next morning he departed. What a view this gives us of his prompt attention to the Divine will. When Lot was commanded to leave Sodom,—to escape for his life,—to secure his personal safety,—he clung to and lingered about the place, which he seems to have forsaken with regret; the angels had to interpose and to compel him to proceed, by taking hold of his hand and forcing him from destruction. But Abraham displayed a readiness in obeying a command of a far different nature; conduct this, to which no motive could urge, but one arising from the determination of universal obedience. The other circumstance is, that the patriarch does not seem to have informed Sarah of the peculiar trial to which he was called; nor did he permit the young men to accompany him to the place of sacrifice: leaving them behind, he and his son went forward alone to the awful and tremendous duty. Now, from



these two things you may learn, *first*, that if ever you are called to the discharge of any painful act, the more speedily you set about it, the better; a difficult duty becomes ten times more difficult by procrastination; your fears multiply; your hesitation increases; your resolution fluctuates, till at length, perhaps, it entirely subsides, and leaves you the victim of lasting regret. The other lesson is this. If your own mind is perfectly made up as to the propriety of doing something that requires great determination, and from which feeling may be in danger of seducing you; perform it without consulting others, or permitting their interference, as it is possible they may exert such a power over sensibility, as entirely to frustrate your purpose, even though your conviction may continue the same. The strength of the mind is in danger of being subdued by the softnesses of the heart. We may internally condemn ourselves at the very moment we yield to their influence. All this, however, may be avoided, by first fixing, like Abraham, our firm determination in consequence of our conviction of duty, and then carrying it out into accomplishment, without exposing ourselves to those influences, by which feeling might be taught to rise up in opposition to the judgment.

The perfect calmness which distinguished the

conduct of Abraham, is worthy particular remark. There is nothing here like turbulent excitement; nothing like the impetuosity of passion; nothing like enthusiasm. It is not the blind impulse of fierce and fanatic feeling, trampling equally upon the understanding and the heart. Devotees have often exposed both themselves and their offspring to the most strange and terrible inflictions, but it has generally been with something like frenzy or desperation. Here, however, there is nothing of this nature. There is the calm, rational, and dignified deportment of a man conscious that he is discharging some great duty, believed to be consistent with supreme wisdom, though both mysterious and agonizing to himself. Nor was this stoical insensibility or Roman pride. His answer to the pointed question of Isaac, is as much distinguished for its mild affection, as for its wise evasion of direct reply. It is not the language either of enthusiasm or sternness. And he had no motive to the mere display of heroic hardihood. When Brutus condemned his two sons to death, the pride of unbending virtue could be gratified by the wondering admiration of the people. But here, the only witnesses that could have been present were purposely prevented approaching, as if to mark both the feeling and the firmness of

the man. It was not passion but principle,—and therefore he *needed* no witnesses to stimulate and reward him. It was not insensibility,—and therefore he *would not have* witnesses, lest they should strengthen the emotion he felt throbbing within him, and interfere with the ultimate execution of his purpose. With the most perfect composure he selected the spot, constructed the altar, laid the wood in order upon it, and then—“stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.” At that moment the angel of God arrested the stroke, and the transaction concluded by the release of Isaac and the renewal of the promises.

#### IV.

The faith of Abraham, in the course of this great trial, would seem to have consisted in this;—He was called to sacrifice his son, and he determined to do it; but, this son was given by promise, and was given expressly as the root of a great nation; this *promise* Abraham continued to believe, even at the time when he was preparing to obey the *command*; he did not doubt, that this very Isaac, who was going “like a lamb to the slaughter,” even if slaughtered, would still be the means of fulfilling the Divine assurances. He knew God

to be faithful; he knew he could not lie; he believed, therefore, that he would furnish some means, whatever they might be, of harmonizing the contradictory duties to which he was called. The patriarch might possibly hope that God would interfere to prevent the completion of the fatal act, or to interrupt the progress of the preparatory proceedings. I rather think, however, that his mind most strongly dwelt upon the idea of Isaac being actually offered and actually restored to life. This seems obviously the meaning of the apostle. "He that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: *accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead.*" The struggle in the mind of the patriarch, would be between his general knowledge of this power on the part of God, and his expectation of its exercise in this particular case. It is intimated, that, whatever might be at first the suggestions of affection or weakness, this expectation rose superior to them all. He continued to feel firmly persuaded, that the promises he had received *would* be fulfilled; that they would be fulfilled in and by Isaac: and that, He who had directed the mysterious act which he was about to accomplish, would make its performance consistent with a confidence in His previous



predictions. This is emphatically "against hope, believing in hope;" trusting to eternal truth, in spite of apparent physical impossibilities.

Such was the triumph of faith in this distinguished saint. He was rewarded in a manner proportioned to the lustre of the achievement. He *did*, in a figure, receive Isaac from the dead; whence, indeed, he had, as it were, received him at first. The offering was virtually made; so far as intention and feeling were concerned it was complete; then Jehovah interposed, pronounced himself satisfied of the patriarch's principle from the evidence afforded by the patriarch's obedience, and gave him his son back again, to his warm, and beating, and bursting heart. Then, too, the Lord repeated to Abraham the promise of glory and distinction to his seed; and, most likely, enabled him, in some measure, to look forward to the time, when "Messiah" should ascend Calvary, bearing his cross, and prepared "to give his life a ransom for many." That this true sacrifice, which the Lord ultimately provided, was typified in this singular transaction, appears extremely probable. Every circumstance seems significant, every object symbolical, and all most beautifully harmonize with the fact when the great purpose of God was actually fulfilled. After so remarkable an engagement, it seems reasonable to

suppose, that Abraham received the most specific information he ever possessed, of the New Testament discoveries. How far this went, it is impossible to say. That something, however, was known must be admitted. Our Lord himself asserts it respecting the patriarch. At this moment, probably, occurred what he stated concerning him ; “ *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day : and he saw it, and was glad.*”

We shall close the present discourse with one general remark. — Abraham had an unquestionable and direct command from God for what he undertook ; the act, therefore, was not only not sinful, but virtuous. It is our happiness not to be required to show our obedience in this way. With respect to us, according to the expression of the prophet, “it is what God commanded not, neither came it into his heart.” We should remember, however, that he does command us to deliver up the objects of our strongest attachments, whenever he sees fit to recall them by death. We must be ready to obey. He does not require it to be done without feeling, but he does require it to be done without a murmur. We are at liberty to sorrow ; but, in the midst of that sorrow, faith is not only to teach us submission, but to change submission into acquiescence, to expand acquiescence into approval,



and to enable us to repeat “the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”—It is worthy of remark, too, that, when we either too earnestly desire any particular blessing, or too fondly prize it if it be possessed, God frequently withholds or threatens to remove it, till we exhibit in *our* will something like coincidence with his,—till we give up, either the idolatrous wish or the idol itself; and, when he has brought us to that,—brought us, like Abraham, to be ready to sacrifice every thing to Him,—then, perhaps, he will confer or continue the very blessings themselves; because he sees they will now occupy that place, and that place only, to which alone all secondary objects are entitled. The way, in fact, really to enjoy temporal blessings, is to give them to God; to regard them as his property rather than our own; when we have presented them, in a manner, to Him, and have received them back with privilege to use them, they are felt to be objects of sacred interest, are sources of purified satisfaction, and become means of improvement as well as instruments of pleasure.

# SERMON XI.

GENERAL CHARACTER OF ABRAHAM.

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HEB. XI. 8—19.

*By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such*

*things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.*

THE whole of this passage, extending from the eighth to the nineteenth verses of the chapter, and containing the apostle's account of the faith of Abraham, has been regularly expounded in the compass of four discourses. In the first of these we remarked, that, in our present attention to the history of these eminent men, whose names Paul has introduced into his argument, it is with the manifestations of their faith that we have to do, and not with every circumstance which the historian may have recorded respecting them. We pretend not to say all that might be said, and all that it would be proper to say, in a series of biographical discourses founded upon the Old Testament; but only to illustrate the operations of that one great principle, which constitutes, in a religious

sense, the foundation of character; and, from the display of its strength, and the contemplation of its triumphs, to appeal practically to you, that you may be excited to act as the "followers of those, who through faith and patience are inheriting the promises."

In this way, and for this purpose, we have brought before you so much of the history, as was necessary to illustrate the faith, of Abraham. That faith was matured and perfected by a series of trials, some of which were of long duration, extending through several years, and requiring, to a certain extent, the uninterrupted exercise of the principle: others were shorter, but more intense, demanding, for a season, the strongest conceivable degree of it. All of these are noticed in the argument of the apostle, and all of them have been illustrated in our exposition of that argument. We saw the prompt obedience of the patriarch, when called to leave the land of his birth, and the scene of his early associations; we followed him when, as a stranger and pilgrim, he sojourned in the promised country, displaying his faith by looking beyond it to a better and more enduring inheritance; we saw him sustain, during a protracted period, a disappointment at once painful to nature and mysterious to faith; and, finally, we stood by him upon

the mount, beheld him prepared to sacrifice that son by whom the promises were to find their accomplishment, and witnessed the complete triumph of the principle, in his continued and confident expectation of the fulfilment of these promises, even though he should actually offer his son upon the altar, for he still "accounted him faithful who had promised," and "believed him to be able to raise up Isaac again from the dead, from whence he also received him in a figure."

From each of these trials of Abraham, we endeavoured to deduce, as we proceeded, such instruction as they appeared respectively calculated to convey; hence, the whole of what we project in these Discourses, respecting each character, may be regarded as accomplished with respect to him. We admit, therefore, that our notice of the patriarch might here entirely cease, without being chargeable with any deficiency, so far as the exhibition of the apostle's argument is concerned. We are disposed to believe, however, that you will not object to accompany us in a more minute examination of the conduct and character of this admirable man. We dwell upon his history longer, it is probable, than we shall upon that of any other of whom mention will be made. And there seems a propriety in this, from the conspicuous place he occupies in

the history of the church, from the peculiarity of his trials, from the stupendous power of his faith under some of them, and from the relation which he bears to believers in all ages, being denominated “the father of the faithful,” and standing out in the Word, as displaying, in the principle for which he is distinguished, an intended example to them that should believe.

In what has been already attempted, we have observed some of the most prominent features of the patriarch’s character, as we have seen him in some of the most extraordinary moments of his life. We have examined the foundation on which his character was built, and we have seen, if we may so speak, some of the substantial materials,—some of the beams and pillars of which that noble erection was composed; but we have not seen many of the minute ornaments, the nice and delicate touches, by which its more elegant parts were embellished and beautified. Character, we should remember, is not *all* evolved by extraordinary situations; and, indeed, in some cases, a judgment can be but imperfectly formed respecting it, if exclusively seen under this aspect. On great occasions, persons may be wrought up to the performance of what shall command admiration; we may follow them into other circumstances, and not only witness nothing to sustain the sentiment,



but nothing to inspire confidence or love. We may see, at some peculiar season, what a man is *capable* of, what he can do, when, with a determined mind, he either bears up under aggravated trial, or accomplishes some resolute purpose. But character, to be truly great, needs to be uniform and consistent; it is that which is habitual; which is seen to prompt and preside in ordinary duty as well as in remarkable emergencies. And character, to be complete, requires the beautiful and the soft, as well as the imposing; it should have grace in combination with strength; it should display the attractive and the lovely, as well as the sublime. Let it have the devotion inspired by faith, the firmness prescribed by principle, the noble attitude of a high-toned and unimpeachable honour; let it have all this, and we will give it the tribute of our homage, and acknowledge its obvious superiority; but still we want something more,—we want something to engage the heart as well as to secure the understanding; something to love as well as to respect: we want the bland and courteous demeanour; we want “grace poured into the lips;” we want to lose the awe inspired by the strength of virtue, while listening to the voice and luxuriating in the view of her tenderness. We want, in short, the union of all that is firm in

principle, and all that is fervent in piety, and all that is commanding in worth,—with whatever is attractive in manners or amiable in feeling; and with all that can sweeten, and soothe, and satisfy, in the contact of ordinary intercourse.

Now, we do not say that we shall find *all* this in the moral portrait of Abraham; but we do say that we shall find a great deal of it. That he committed errors and had his faults, is only saying that he was a man; but that these bore no proportion to the diversified excellence of his character, and the eminent purity of his life, is manifest from the whole tenour of his history. He deserves distinction, not only for that faith from which such a strong and steady light is cast upon his memory; but for various delicacies of mind and feeling which surround it with a beautiful and softened effulgence. These, indeed, were the fruits of his faith. They were the displays of the principle which rendered him “the friend of God,” called forth by the contact of its possessor with men. It was an active and practical power, prompting to universal obedience. It did not consist in speculative notions about the Divine attributes; nor in mere mental acquiescence in the Divine procedure; nor in selfish acceptance of the Divine promises; nor in any other exclusively intellectual or internal act: but it consisted

in the carrying out of every pulsation of the heart and every conclusion of the understanding, into the vigorous and conscientious discharge of whatever it became him to regard, either as a servant of the true God, or as a man related to other men, to whom he owed, therefore, the diversified expressions of social morality.

We shall this morning direct your attention to some parts of the general character of Abraham; and to the improvement which it becomes us to derive from his example.

As, however, we hinted just now, that the patriarch "committed errors and had his faults," it may not be amiss to advance a remark or two, first of all, respecting them. It is possible that even these may furnish some lesson worthy our remembrance.

The sacred writer has recorded, that twice Abraham so far forgot, not only what was due to his character as a man, and to his profession as a worshipper of the living God; but also what was due to the express assurances of that Being who has the hearts of all men in his hand, and whose promised protection, therefore, must be a sufficient defence; as to stoop, if not to absolute falsehood, certainly to something not far short of it. He employed equivocation; that is to say, he used language in one sense, which he

knew the person he addressed would take in another. He expressed a certain idea by his selected phraseology, but he knew that was *not* the idea which his words would convey to the mind of Abimelech. Such conduct was neither religious nor manly. It was altogether inconsistent with his acknowledged character. It betrayed excessive pusillanimity. It was insulting to that God in whom he professed to confide, and from whom he had received such repeated and such explicit pledges of protection.

Now, observe the consequences of this. First. The very thing which he thought to avoid, happened; and it happened just *because* he had employed a disingenuous and crooked policy. Abimelech told him that it would not, or should not, have occurred, had he been open and explicit from the first. And secondly. He was compelled to submit to a rebuke from the lips of an idolatrous prince, when his criminality was discovered, and when he acknowledged the mean subterfuge to which he had descended. How humiliating was this! Nothing is more painful than to see persons of eminent virtue brought, by the weakness of a moment, into such circumstances, that others, far less conspicuous for character, can charge them, and charge them justly, with conduct unworthy of themselves. Let us never forget, my brethren,



that "the path of duty," of integrity and honour, "is the path of safety;" that any deviation from known and acknowledged principle; any deliberate violation of conscience; any sacrifice of truth, however apparently trivial; any attempt, in fact, to avoid danger by the employment of forbidden weapons and crooked devices,—will most likely end in disappointment; will produce the very calamity we dread; and, what is far worse than any calamity whatever, will expose us to the keen and cutting censure, if not to the indignant contempt, of men who despise our faith, but who know how to judge of propriety of feeling and rectitude of conduct.

Another imperfection in Abraham was the taking into his own hands, at the solicitation of Sarah, the fulfilment of the promise. Despairing of that promise being accomplished; anxious and discontented under the delay; he was prevailed upon, evidently without consulting the Divine will, to employ a method, suggested by unbelief and acquiesced in from weakness, in order to secure the blessing which was so long withheld. He received Hagar from the hand of his wife, with the intention and the hope of thus terminating the trial under which they lived, and realizing the promise upon which they depended. This fact exhibits, in a very strong light, the danger in

which our religion and character may be placed by the influence of intimate and endeared connexions; and the necessity of guarding every avenue of the heart, through which principle might be too successfully assailed. The conduct of Sarah and Abraham, in this instance, was characterized by extreme distrust, by criminal impatience, and by excessive presumption. Instead of resting satisfied with the Divine declaration; instead of acquiescing in whatever the Supreme Wisdom prescribed; instead of permitting that Wisdom to accomplish its own purposes in its own way; they must rebel against his government, and attempt, by plans and methods of *theirs*, to obtain the blessing which they knew was promised, but which they unreasonably doubted they were never to possess!—Now, what could be expected to result from such unhallowed sentiments and such direct disobedience? Nothing but such consequences as actually did result. In the first place, they were soon taught the absurdity of supposing that they *could* counteract the intentions of God, or fulfil, in one way, any purpose of his, which he had determined to accomplish in another. And, in the second place, the very success of their policy, so far as it did succeed, became the source of long and painful domestic disquietude. Sarah was



punished by insult from the very person she had elevated. The father's heart clasped and clung to his child, and yet he was compelled to command his departure, and to snap ties that bound him tenderly to the boy. That very boy, at the birth of him who was the child of promise, mocked his pretensions, and ridiculed the parental elation of feeling with which he was received. Thus, for many a year, did a single act of presumption and disobedience give rise to domestic infelicity, occasion scenes of discord, and originate a chastisement and a scourge by the very success with which it seemed to be consummated.

From this subject we may learn, First. That impatience under Providence may lead us, in a moment of temptation, to presume to take God's work out of his hand : but that, as sure as ever we attempt any thing obviously wrong, under the pretence of accomplishing what is right ; or, as sure as we adopt any doubtful expedient, without humbly seeking the Divine guidance and sanction ; so surely shall we lay the foundation, both for certain discomfiture and subsequent punishment. Secondly. That, not only is every sin the seed, so to speak, of a punishment, but that, the punishment flowing from it by way of natural consequence, may accompany us for years, or even for life, in spite both of

repentance on our part and forgiveness on that of God. He will pardon our sin, but he will not work a miracle to destroy its consequences. Thirdly. We learn, that persons, eminently distinguished for some particular virtue, should be particularly observant; for, it is most probable, that, if they fail at all, it will be just in that point where they are acknowledged to be strongest. "The father of the faithful" erred, because unbelief acquired a temporary predominance; and the boldest of all the apostles sank to the most dastardly denial of his Lord. Fourthly. We may be encouraged under the recollection of conscious defects, by knowing that the most distinguished servants of God were not perfect; though we are to be warned also, that, if *they* had need of vigilance, much more we. Lastly. We may notice that the exposure, by the sacred penmen, of the faults of their favourite characters, is a very strong proof of fidelity. It seems to indicate that they did not invent, but record; that they described facts, and described them as they stood, without partiality and without extenuation. It is a pledge for their honesty therefore; and, if that be admitted, we know that as honest men they could never combine to impose a known system of falsehood upon the world.

Let us now proceed to notice some of the

specific excellencies, by which Abraham was habitually characterized.

1. His piety and devotion. These terms express the frequent recollection of God, and attention to those exercises by which the mind rises to intercourse with him. That Abraham was a devout man; and that this was displayed, both by his regard to positive acts of worship accompanied by external expressions of devotion, and by the prevailing habit of his mind, is evident from the general tenour of his life. He is expressly and beautifully denominated "the friend of God;" a title which implies congeniality and intercourse. Friendship is never suspected to exist between persons, who, having constant opportunities of communion, are yet never known to avail themselves of these. It is as certain, that the existence of friendship will lead to the desire and indulgence of intercourse, as that any of the laws of nature will continue to operate as they have done since the creation. The propriety of the epithet, attached to the name of Abraham, could only be sustained, by the fact of his daily recollection of God; his indulgence in devout meditation on the Divine perfections; his reference, in all things, to the Divine will; and his careful cultivation of that disposition and temper, calculated to invite and secure his presence. The

situation and trials, in fact, of the patriarch, had a necessary tendency both to prompt and purify his devotion. How could *he* forget the Invisible, who walked by faith, not by sight? He might for a season be seduced into such surprising neglect; but the state of mind would be unnatural, and he would soon be recalled, by palpable facts, to the renewed recollection of Him, whose hand was leading him from station to station, and whose existence and character could alone interpret the successive circumstances in which he was involved.—As to positive acts of devotion and worship, we have several instances of such beautifully introduced in the course of his history. Wherever he was honoured and refreshed by a communication from God; wherever he pitched his tent and rested for a season; there did he erect an altar, in grateful remembrance of Divine mercy, and as a solemn pledge for religious observances. He was a man of prayer. With what inimitable simplicity is the fact stated by the historian, when he says, and says so often, “*then did Abraham call upon the name of the Lord!*” It was thus, that he both acknowledged his obligations to the protecting Power, and received supplies of invigorating strength. It was by these exercises, that faith was nourished and preserved. The



patriarch was thus brought into the presence, and made increasingly sensible of the agency, of that God on whom he depended. And it was thus, also, that faith was displayed; and that, too, both as “the persuasion of things not seen, and the expectation of things hoped for.” He, whom Abraham addressed, and the world to which his mind was lifted, were things invisible to sense, the deep conviction of whose reality led him to the act; while all his supplications, however they might be connected with his earthly pilgrimage, had a supreme reference to what he hoped for in that eternal city on which his faith terminated, and towards which he was anxious to press with undeviating aim.

As an improvement to this particular, suffer me to make at least *three* remarks respecting the subject of which it treats. In the *first* place, I would take occasion to notice the vast importance to be attached to habits of devotion, even upon the most general principles of moral reasoning.—When we regard man in his relation to God, it would seem, that habits of devotion are as essential to virtue, as, when we regard him in relation to others, are habits of integrity and truth. All, therefore, who acknowledge the Divine existence and government, but who neglect the cultivation of this

part of character, are, upon their own professions, defective in virtue. Hence, their proud appeals to their moral principles and conduct, and their equally proud dependence upon these, are rendered nugatory and false, by their criminal neglect of what even they, to be consistent with themselves, must acknowledge to be essential to virtuous character. Are they to suppose, then, that God will hold them guiltless, because, while they have attended to the duties arising from their relations to men, they have neglected *only* those which flow from their relations to Himself? In fact, the virtuous man of society, believes and acts upon positions more irrational and absurd, than were ever entertained by any religionist whatever. He believes, that God may be treated with such indifference as he himself would resent,—that he may have every just claim practically denied and regularly refused,—and yet, that he will reward the individual who does it, for his partial and imperfect discharge of inferior duties! That is to say, in other words, after committing the *wrong* of giving to others or to himself, that primary regard, which, of absolute right, belongs to God, he expects God actually to sanction and approve the *injustice* ;—I say the injustice, for, strange as it may seem, it is into this—into one of those very crimes, on



his freedom from which the virtuous man plumes himself, that all virtue, separate from devotion, is ultimately to be resolved.

Again. The pleasures of devotion, (the phrase, perhaps, is not quite accurate, it is however intelligible;) the pleasures of devotion, if this were the proper opportunity, might be largely illustrated. It is surely to be expected that something surpassing the satisfaction of all other enjoyments, should attend the intercourse of the soul with God. I suppose that in the experience of every Christian, there have been moments, when, in some degree, this has been enjoyed: when the power of faith has been felt, in augmenting the impression of the invisible and the future; in exciting the feeling, and prompting the expressions, of holy confidence; in sustaining the persuasion of pardon; and diffusing through the soul what is emphatically denominated "*the peace of God.*" It is of more importance, however, to observe, that we should nourish and animate our devotion, by frequently recollecting the fact of prayer being the means of our obtaining the *direct* bestowment of blessings. We are not to be seduced "by philosophy and vain deceit," by suggestions of "science falsely so called," to imagine that all the advantage of prayer, consists in its reflex operation on the

mind. Nor are we to engage in the exercise itself, without aiming at such a perfect conviction of the truth of God's promises, and the certainty of our being able to obtain direct and positive communications of good, as may raise us above the "wavering" of the "double minded man," and enable us to offer "the prayer of faith." It is here, I suspect, that Christians are principally defective. They do not actually neglect prayer; but, they very often pray without any adequate impression of the nature and power of the instrument they employ, and without the least thought or belief of *really* "*having the things for which they ask.*" It is surely as necessary, if not more so, that we pray in a right spirit as that we pray at all. The spirit of faith—of "perfect persuasion and confident expectation,"—persuasion of the power of the means and expectation of the substance of the promise—this is that spirit. "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss."

Still farther. In consequence of our weakness, let us remember, that it becomes us to attach great importance, both to positive acts of devotion, and to habits of regularity in the prosecution of the duty. If social engagements and public opportunities be given up; if the employment of language in private be thought

unnecessary; if no fixed and regular seasons be regarded;—if, that is to say, any individual think lightly of such means, as are evidently fitted to aid either the excitement or the expression of devotion; and, if he profess to pray, only when he finds himself in a becoming frame; such a person, I should expect soon to hear, had quite ceased to pray at all. External acts and vocal expressions, tend to fix attention and warm the heart. The regular call of the hour of prayer reminds us of duty; breaks in upon secular associations; forces us, so to speak, to think of that world we are so liable to forget; and leads us into our chamber—to our Father who seeth in secret, and to whom, if the call came not, we might cease to approach. The habit of attending to stated seasons of devotion, should be pursued in connexion with that of paying a proper regard to those occasional frames of mind, in which we seem irresistibly drawn, spontaneously prompted, to the sublime and delightful duty. Neither habit should be exclusively preferred, neither neglected. The one characterizes the slave of formality, the other the child of enthusiasm; it is the union of the two that separates and distinguishes the Christian from both.

2. But, to return; we observe, in the second place, that, in connexion with this habit of

elevated devotion by which Abraham was distinguished from surrounding idolaters, he always manifested towards them, as men, the most respectful and courteous demeanour. There was nothing acrimonious or repulsive about his spirit and conduct. He does not seem to have supposed that he could either glorify God, or recommend his religion, by a gloomy, misanthropic temper; by unamiable manners; by the swellings of spiritual pride, or the effusions of spiritual asperity. He was certainly respected, if not loved, by those who surrounded him, and with whom he came in contact in the ordinary intercourse of life; and this respect on their part, could only have been excited by corresponding behaviour on his; it was the respect not of fear, but of admiration and affection; there was a good deal of tenderness about it; he and his neighbours entered into leagues of amity, and, when differences arose between them in consequence of the conduct of their servants, there was no seizing upon them to emit the smothered feelings of pride or animosity, but a candid and open explanation; a readiness, on both sides, to act with a solicitude to excel in respect, and to display a confidence inspired by esteem. — What a perfect picture of the dignified and the beautiful of social life, is presented by the behaviour of Abraham to the sons



of Heth, when "he stood up from before his dead," and sought to purchase a sepulchre ! They urged his acceptance of it as a gift, and urged it in language that indicated intimacy, "What is that between thee and us !" It is almost the language of friendship, and would never have been employed towards one who had been splenetic, repulsive, haughty or reserved. He did not and would not accept it on the terms proposed ; but, how did he express this determination ? not by a proud contempt of the manifested kindness ; not by insulting the men, as if he should be contaminated by a contact with them or theirs ; no : "*he bowed himself before the people of the land ;*" he was firm, but he was respectful ; he was resolved to give the value of whatever he received, but he expressed his purpose in a manner that did honour to them as well as to himself. The men were not of his faith ; they worshipped not at the same altar ; they possessed not the same privileges ; but they were men ; and, as such, Abraham treated them with that civil reverence, that bland and becoming affability, which men as men owe to each other.

3. But, it is next to be observed, that this courtesy, on the part of the patriarch, never led to compliances or compacts inconsistent with his religious profession. He was all that

man could be, and all that man ought to be, to his fellows. Whatever was honourable, whatever was attractive, I imagine, appeared in Abraham towards his idolatrous neighbours. There was cordiality and kindness; there was the friendly and familiar interchange of good offices; but, there was not the sanction of what was sinful, nor the formation of such intimate confederacies, as might lead either himself or his son to disobey the Supreme law. Hence, though he lived on such terms as we have described with the people of the land; though his devotion had nothing about it like morbid moroseness; though, when necessary, he could mix and mingle in the world, without betraying any thing like the proud feeling of personal degradation; yet, he would not on any account permit, that Isaac should take from among its families the wife of his bosom. His servant was solemnly commanded to prevent this, and was sent to secure a more suitable alliance. Such was, at once, the manifestation, on the part of Abraham, of all that was amiable in the man, with all that was decided in the believer. He would not suffer such a union between his family and those of an erroneous faith, as would be displeasing to God, and must necessarily endanger the principles and piety of his son. He would



not do, that is to say, what was obviously sinful or prospectively pernicious; but, so far as social intercourse would be maintained free from this,—so far he was willing to maintain it; and so far he displayed towards those, who, in a christian sense would be said to be without, whatever was estimable and attractive, so that, he might properly be said, to have had “a good report of all men, and of the truth itself.”

4. As the head of an extensive household, it is distinctly recorded of him, that he was solicitous about the religious character of all committed to his care. This testimony to Abraham was distinctly borne by Jehovah himself, when he appeared to him previous to the destruction of Sodom; “Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I do,—seeing that I know him,—that he will command his children and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord?” True faith will infallibly display itself by inspiring a religious concern for others, especially for those who, by nature or circumstance, are placed under us, and for whose salvation we are partly responsible. It is to be feared, that, even among professed believers, some parents are to be found, who are by no means sufficiently concerned for their children; and many masters, who never imagine for a moment that they have any thing to do with the

religion of their domestics. Abraham, however, thought otherwise; and hence, he is particularly distinguished, by the Divine Being, for his conscientious regard to the piety of his house. "Children are the heritage of the Lord;" they are his; minds which he has made for himself, but which for a season he has committed to *you*; committed as a sacred deposit, to be watched over and preserved, preparatory to that higher life which is their ultimate destination: He will hereafter require an account of your stewardship; awful disclosures will be made then; terrible will be the rebuke of many a parent, when it is shown, that to *his* neglect is mainly to be attributed the ruin of his offspring. By masters much might be done, both to mitigate the asperities of servitude, and to form the minds of their domestics for the eternal inheritance they anticipate themselves. In the world to which we are hasting, all but moral distinctions will vanish; every individual, of every rank, will be exclusively regarded in relation to his spiritual fitness for heaven; it is our business *now* habitually to realize the truth,—to contemplate each other as possessing the same capacity in relation to God, and as travelling together towards that state, where every difference, in the present condition of our being, will be forgotten from the absorbing

importance of this. These salutary recollections, without diminishing the rational regard which is due to the present constitution of society, will tend both to inspire respect for inferiors and dependants, and to prompt exertions for their spiritual benefit. The Scriptures contain much to recommend and enforce the duty. St. Paul's letter to Philemon respecting a slave whom he had converted, shows how condescending and comprehensive was the benevolence of the apostle, and is sufficient to give sublimity and grandeur to every act that seeks the salvation even of the lowest of the species. It is forcibly intimated by the same apostle, in his admonitions to servants, that "*they may adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour,*" as if, by so splendid an expression, he designed to impress both themselves and their masters with a becoming respect for their moral nature. What a beautiful remark that is in the Gospels, "*a centurion's servant who was very dear unto him!*" There is something uncommonly touching in this display of affection and tenderness towards a domestic. "Brethren, think on these things." Imitate the conduct of Abraham as a father and a master; "as you have opportunity, do good unto all, but especially to such as are of *your own* household." With respect to servants, if the obligation to care for their

religious character cannot be felt simply as duty, solicitude for your children should inspire and promote it, as, upon children, they frequently exert a great and lasting, and, too often, a pernicious influence. On the whole, it becomes you "to walk before your house with a perfect heart;" that is, with a sincere and universal attention to relative duties; maintaining domestic devotion, enforcing catechetical exercises, and displaying the attractive example of a uniform, consistent, and holy life.

5. Meekness and moderation, friendship and magnanimity, are all conspicuous in the conduct of Abraham towards Lot. The very essence of the christian spirit was displayed by him when it was found desirable to part from each other. "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee,—for we are brethren; is not the whole land before thee? if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or—if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." As the elder person and uncle of Lot, Abraham might have demanded priority of choice, but he readily waved every such claim, only solicitous to preserve peace and accommodate his kinsman. They did separate; and afterwards, when Lot was seized by invaders, and taken away with all his possessions, the patriarch armed his servants,



pursued and conquered the enemy; engaged in scenes very repugnant, we may suppose, to his disposition and feeling, but necessary to be braved for the sake of one whom he loved as a brother. In contrast with the character of Lot, that of Abraham appears to immense advantage. Lot was unquestionably a good man, from the manner in which he is spoken of, and the epithet with which he is distinguished, by an apostle; but he was very imperfect and very inconsistent. His choice of situation was probably too much influenced by mere temporal considerations; his connexion with the people of the plain was far too close and intimate; he dwelt *in* the city; he suffered some of his daughters to marry idolaters, and was thus, it seems, the means of their destruction; he lost all the possessions for the sake of which he had probably both endangered and injured his virtue; and he was actually so blind and infatuated, as to yield a reluctant obedience to commands which contemplated his own safety. Such is the deadening influence of indulged sin, and such the variety of evils that may flow from one corrupt calculation and choice!

6. We might notice many other points in the character of Abraham, such as his hospitality; for, being "not unmindful to entertain strangers,"

he at one time “entertained angels unawares:” we might notice, too, his independence of mind, indicated by his dignified refusal of the spoil offered him by the king of Sodom; and, in connexion with all this, we might illustrate his exquisite sensibility, seen in the tenderness of his sorrow for Ishmael, and in the tears which he shed over the ashes of Sarah. But, we omit these, to close this brief and imperfect portraiture of his excellence, by adverting to his religious philanthropy, as witnessed by his persevering intercession for Sodom. The announcement of the judgment suspended over so many souls, seems to have strongly excited his solicitude, and to have prompted him to seek their deliverance by the only means he could employ; by prayer,—prayer to that Being with whom it lay to pardon or to punish. Abraham knew the efficacy of prayer; he had often felt and seen the proof of its actually possessing power with God; and he attempted to avert by it the terrible catastrophe, that seemed ready to descend on the devoted people. With what awe and humility the patriarch approaches God! He regards himself as but dust and ashes, and deprecates the Divine anger, as if it were likely to be roused by his presumption. But, with what benevolent pertinacity, if we may use such an expression, he perseveres in preferring his



request! How he pursues his argument, from one degree to another, anxious to approach the very lowest amount to which the number might be reduced! And the nature of the plea he urges is worthy of serious regard. It is not founded on the claim either of the wicked or the miserable; he seems to acknowledge the righteous exposure of the impenitent to punishment, but he prays that, for the sake of others, *they* might be saved. It is the argument, in fact, employed now by the Intercessor of the church; he pleads for the sinner, not simply as such, but because he, the Just One, has fulfilled the law, and brought in an everlasting righteousness. The patriarch did not prevail. The plea which he pressed would have been admitted if it could have been found; but it was not. The evening closed upon him after this solemn season of communion with God. He departed to his place. Early, however, the next morning he returned to the spot, as if anxious to ascertain the effect of his appeal. He looked towards all the land of the plain, and the very first glance conveyed the terrible intelligence. The vials of wrath had descended, and now "the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace."

What a view, my brethren, both the intercession and the argument of Abraham give us

of the value of good men! Jehovah would have saved the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, with all their immense population, for the sake of ten righteous persons, had that number been there. Indeed, it is very remarkable, that even those who *were* saved, are represented as owing their escape to God's consideration of another's worth. "When the Lord destroyed the cities of the plain," it is said, "he remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow;" as if, you observe, Lot's connexion with Abraham occasioned the mercy he received. There is much meaning in this passage, both in relation to the present subject, and as illustrating how God *may* act in the general discharge of his moral government.

Learn, then, brethren, that, by possessing the faith of Abraham, by imitating his devotion, by being able to present that effectual fervent prayer which avails much, the meanest and most obscure amongst you may exert a positive influence on the happiness of the world. You cannot enlighten society by literary productions or scientific discoveries; you cannot confer such benefits upon men as would result from improvements in commerce or legislation; but you can be holy,—and you can pray; you can thus adorn the age, and you can serve it; to you it may be indebted for

blessings infinitely more valuable, than any which merely blend with its wealth or its literature. You may arrest the progress of guilt; you may lessen the aggravations of crime; you may close some of the sources of corruption. If wickedness increase, you may delay its punishment; if that punishment *must* come,—you have done your part; your efforts will be judged by their principle, not by their success: you will be acknowledged, in the end, in your real character—the lovers of your country and the benefactors of the world, to whom both were indebted for some of their best and brightest distinctions. “Ye are the salt of the earth.” By your prayers, and for your sake, it is preserved. It is because God has a church in the world, that the world itself is continued. Had he no object of delight and complacency like this, he would immediately blot it from its place in the universe. “Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.” Upon this principle it will be found hereafter, that thousands of the obscurest members of a community, were the truest and purest patriots, while many who were lauded as the bulwarks of its defence, were far more destructive to its prosperity and interests, than the arms or the incursions of the most formidable foe.

## SERMON XII.

JUSTIFICATION.

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HEB. XI. 8—19.

*By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such*



*things, declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.*

THE importance uniformly attached in scripture to the name of Abraham, furnished us with a reason for entering, in our last discourse, into a more minute examination of his general character than had hitherto been attempted; the same reason will account for our proposing to wind up the whole of our observations respecting him, by a few brief remarks on the great doctrine, which his history is so frequently employed to illustrate. Paul, more than once, refers to some analogy between the case of the patriarch and that of every sinful man who is justified by faith. In the particular exercise of mind and feeling, which Jehovah demanded of Abraham; in the personal blessing with which it was succeeded; and in the practical manifestations to which it led; we are said to have a

picture of what God requires of men under the gospel; of the way in which he will absolve them from all iniquity; and of the proofs which they are to afford of the moral power of the process by which the Divine mercy accomplishes their salvation. "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now, it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him, but for ours also, to whom it will be imputed if we believe on him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead." "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? and the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness."

The manner in which I conceive the proposed observations may be made the most intelligible to a general auditory, and which, therefore, I shall forthwith adopt, will be, *first*, to exhibit what justification is, and how it may be obtained among men, together with a description of the feelings occasioned by the different kinds of it, and the natural effects of these on subsequent conduct: *next*, to show how the mode and the results of a sinner's justification with God, tally with these; *and then*, to endeavour to detect the



point of coincidence, between this New Testament view of the matter, and that involved in the account of the "father of the faithful." Permit me to premise, that you are not to draw your conclusions from any one part of our illustration exclusively; you are to notice, as we advance, the separate and specific importance of each particular; to observe, also, its relative bearing upon the rest; and then, in the end, to mark the general result to which we shall be led; towards which result, each consideration will contribute something, and which, therefore, will require, for its just apprehension, a regard to all the considerations in their combined character.

## I.

Justification is a term taken from judicial proceedings. It supposes an examination into conduct by comparing it with the requirements of some law. It is of two kinds, proper and improper, or primary and secondary. The first is, when the examination terminates in *favour* of the individual. He is proved and pronounced to *be*, literally and in fact, all that the law requires. This is justification-proper. The second sense of the term, refers to the delivery from punishment of a convicted offender. In

this case the examination terminates *against* the individual. He is proved and pronounced *not* to be what the law requires. A pardon, however, being granted, destroys the connexion between his conduct and its consequences. This is justification-improper, or secondary.

In both these cases the *fact* of justification would be the same, but the *feeling* of the supposed individuals would be very different. In justification-proper, the character of the man whose conduct is submitted to a comparison with the law, presents to the eye of the examiner a perfect counterpart of the law itself. Hence, the law, seeing this reflection of itself in the individual, pronounces that it has nothing against him, either as to accusation or penalty. He is declared free both from sin and guilt—that is, both from the actual violation of the law, which is sin; and from the relation to the law of one who has violated it, which is, exposure to punishment, or guilt.\* The law looks upon him

\* This term has two senses. It is sometimes employed to express personal culpability—the *character* of one who has *committed* offence. At others, it is employed to express answerableness to law, or exposure to punishment—the *condition* of one who is *convicted* of offence. The first may be termed its moral, the second its legal signification. An offender is guilty in the first sense before trial, and would continue so after it, were he, for want of evidence legally to convict him, to be acquitted. In the second sense he is not

complacently,—alleges nothing, threatens nothing; pronounces that it actually has no ground of complaint, and therefore, no reason for punishment. But, justification-improper amounts to virtually the same thing. In this case, the character of the individual does *not* present to the eye of the examiner a counterpart of the law; the law, therefore, *not* seeing in him this reflection of itself, pronounces that it *has* something against him, both as to accusation and penalty; he is convicted of sin, or actual violation of the law, and hence, by natural consequence, he is involved in guilt, or, in other words, he sustains the relation to the law of one who has broken the law,—that is, expo-

guilty till after trial—that is, after being proved to be culpable by a legal process. Hence, it is easy to perceive how, in two different ways, a person may be both innocent and guilty at the same time. He who *is* morally guilty, but who cannot be proved so, is not legally guilty; he who is *not* morally guilty, but who *appears* to be proved so, *is* legally guilty. The distinction is important, but this is not the place to pursue its illustration. When I wrote the definition in the text, I intended, for the sake of precision, to confine my use of the term to the legal sense; I have not done it; in fact, I found the attempt inconvenient in a popular discourse, and therefore I add this note to apprise the reader of the circumstance, and to explain the other sense of the term, which, though not adverted to or included in the use of it in the above passage, will be found to attach to it in some subsequent passages.

sure to punishment. Pardon, however, for the offence being equitably obtained, exposure to punishment ceases of course. The law, as it were, looks upon the man and finds all ground of complaint fled, and therefore all reason for punishment destroyed. This second individual is thus virtually placed in the condition and clothed with the character of the first. He is looked upon, *as if he were*, literally and in fact, what the law requires,—what the other man is, and what he is not. He is *looked upon* as if he were, and, consequently he is *treated* as if he were. Hence, so far as the simple *result* of the examination and judgment respecting the two individuals, is considered, it appears to be exactly the same thing. That which is denominated pardon, when contemplated in its relation to the act of sin and the executive power,—is justification, when contemplated in relation to the desert of sin and the prescribing law.

Though the fact of justification, or the result of the instituted inquiry, be thus in these two cases virtually the same thing, it is to be further observed, that the feeling of the two individuals is very different. You will see this the more strongly if you suppose, that, previous to the examination, a direct and positive accusation is made against both. When the first man is



brought up for trial, his calm, erect, dignified deportment evinces that he has no fear for the result. He denies the charge against him with firmness; he listens to his accusers without emotion; he opposes their evidence with counter and convincing testimonies of innocence; all is clear, and full, and demonstrative; the judge is satisfied of his perfect conformity to the law—that is proved, instead of its violation; he is declared legally and literally just; he has justified himself; and he moves from the bar, to which he should never have been brought, with the high and majestic air of a man injured by suspicion, his pulse beating with the strong and stirring emotions of conscious and insulted virtue.—When the second man is brought up for trial, his very countenance and manner convict him. If he deny the charge, it will be either with a boldness, itself the consequence of guilt; or with faltering and tremulous accents, indicating that he knows denial to be useless. Every accusation is substantiated; the evidence against him is clear, and full, and demonstrative; he has nothing to reply; he stands a proved and convicted offender; the law has been violated and the penalty incurred;—by pardon, however, the offence is virtually, and the liability to punishment actually, destroyed; he has not justified himself; he cannot be

declared legally and literally just,—but he can be treated as if he were; the charge against him can be considered either as if it had not been made, or had not been substantiated; the law, therefore, sees no reason to censure, and says nothing to terrify; he may depart; he may move from the bar, where justice could have condemned, but where mercy has absolved, him; he has liberty and life secured; but they are given to him as a boon, they are not rendered to him as a right: he may retire, indeed, and with nothing to make him afraid; but, retiring under such circumstances, he cannot, and dare not exhibit any thing like the dignified deportment of the innocent accused; however he may feel joy and lightness of heart, it will be connected with such a feeling of conscious criminality, and such a sense of personal demerit, as to repress every tendency to pride, and to crush and annihilate every emotion like those which were manifested by the man, who walked forth with the character of established and vindicated virtue.

## II.

Such are the two modes of justification in a court of law, and such the different feelings with which they are respectively attended. In



further pursuing the subject, we must limit our remarks to one, and that the latter, of the above justifications. It is to be observed, then, that not only are there these two kinds of justification itself, but there are two ways in which the last kind of it may be obtained. This kind consists, as we have seen, in pardon; and we mean to say, that there are two principles, clearly distinguishable, upon which pardon may be dispensed. You are of course keeping in mind that we have now altogether left the first individual, who could justify himself, and are about to confine our observations to the case of the second; to him, who, upon being examined according to a certain law, is pronounced to be an offender; stands exposed and detected as such,—liable to whatever penalty is attached to disobedience. For this man to obtain justification-proper, is utterly out of the question. A pardon, and nothing but a pardon, can possibly save him. This he may obtain in two ways; or, in other words, it may be granted or dispensed, upon the one or the other of two grounds. These grounds we shall proceed to specify.

In the first place, the ground or consideration which shall weigh with the government,—with those who, invested with the supreme executive power of the state, are supposed to possess, to

a certain extent, the prerogative of mercy ;—the ground or consideration which shall weigh with them, and shall lead to the exercise of the prerogative in this particular case, might be something arising directly and immediately from the prisoner himself. It might be his previously good character ; or it might be the apparent reality of his penitence ; his promises of amendment ; and his earnest supplications for the exercise of the prerogative. If the offence were comparatively trivial, or if there were any doubt of the perfect propriety of the law itself, these considerations might prevail ; the prince or the parliament, or whoever reigned in the state as supreme, might, in such a case, be induced to grant a pardon, and to confer upon the man justification by favour. This, as we have already shown, is what pardon amounts to. It would virtually annihilate the offence of the individual ; it would actually deliver him from the penalty attached to it ; he could never be arraigned upon the same charge again : in short, to the eye of the government, he would appear *as if* he had never committed the offence at all.

It is thus that, upon some ground arising directly from the man himself, pardon may be dispensed, or, in other words, justification-improper or secondary obtained. But, it is next to be observed, that the case may prove entirely

destitute of this kind of appeal to the prerogative,—this personal ground for its equitable exercise. The offence may be such, as to admit of no plea, either from previous or subsequent conduct. The law may be just and good. And here it is necessary to remark, more distinctly than we have yet done, that, in well-regulated governments it is *this* that reigns. The individual denominated the sovereign is the representative, so to speak, of the majesty of the law; of the great principles of truth and rectitude supposed to pervade all its regulations. He is bound to act, therefore, *according to law*. His personal and official character are to be carefully distinguished. In the one he has certain feelings; in the other he has certain functions and duties. The impulses of the first are not to interfere with the discharge of the second, except so far, and in such a manner, as, on some peculiar occasions, may be obviously consistent with, and may actually maintain, the equity and honour of the law itself. All this is fully understood by the common sense of mankind, in relation to well-regulated governments, and is known to apply, according to their form, either to the individual or individuals in whom is invested the supreme executive power of the state. Our reasonings refer not to what may take place under a despot,—under one whose

mere will is law ; who acknowledges no principle whatever, as a rule or a restraint ; who can make laws, or suspend them, according to his pleasure ; who can either pardon or punish, as suits his personal feelings—his vindictiveness or his caprice. It is not to such a sovereign, nor such a government, that our illustrations apply ; but to one in which laws, supposed to be equitable, are also supposed to be equitably dispensed. In this case, the individual, or individuals, who represent the sovereignty of the law, act according to their official, not their personal, character : they are bound to regard what is suggested by rectitude, as well as what is suggested by compassion. When a person, therefore, stands before them, circumstanced like the man whom we have just described, whatever may be the depth of his penitence and the earnestness of his appeal, and whatever may be the throbbings of sensibility in themselves,—yet, remembering what they owe to the law which they represent, to their own consistency in the view of their subjects, and even, it might be added, to those subjects themselves,—remembering all this, it might be, that, with all their personal desire, as men, to exercise mercy, they might feel it to be utterly incompatible with their imperative obligations and duties as governors ; and they might be positively com-



pelled to deliver the prisoner to death, at the very moment when their hearts were yearning to save him.

Let us suppose, however, that the deliberations of government upon the case of a convicted offender, circumstanced as we have just described, instead of terminating in the command to inflict the penalty of the law, should terminate in its suspension, and in the arrangement of some extraordinary measure, which, being appealed to by the guilty man, should be admitted as a valid ground for the exercise of the prerogative. We *can* suppose this; and it might occur. Such a course, though confessedly singular, might certainly be adopted. If adopted, then, the ground or reason, on account of which pardon was dispensed, would be something that did *not* rise directly and immediately from the offender himself. This, whatever it might be, being employed or pleaded by the prisoner, in the precise manner appointed by the government, would weigh with those who exercised the supreme executive power of the state, just as the previous virtue, &c. of the first man weighed in *his* case; — the supplicated pardon would be granted, and justification-secondary consequently conferred. The same results would follow as before. The man's offence would virtually be annihilated; he

would actually be delivered from the penalty attached to it; by the government he would henceforth be viewed *as if* he had never committed the offence at all. From all this it appears, that, in consequence of some extraordinary appointment altogether independent of the person himself,—as well as in consequence of some considerations arising directly and immediately from him,—a man may obtain the justification of favour, when he cannot demand the justification of right. In both cases the kind of justification is the same, but the reason for granting it is very different.

Here we might make a remark similar to what was suggested by our first illustration. We then observed, in the case of the two individuals who obtained, respectively, primary and secondary justification, that, though the fact of justification would be the same in respect to both, yet the feelings of the parties would be very different; and this we showed necessarily to arise from the different nature of the justification itself. In the present case, however, not only is the fact of justification the same in both individuals, but also the nature of it; there is here, then, a much greater agreement than before; yet even here, also, is there a difference of feeling; and this, it will be seen, as necessarily arises from the different ground on which the



one and the same justification is conferred. Both of the men last described are offenders; both receive, therefore, justification by pardon; he, however, who receives it in consideration of something in himself,—his present penitence or previous virtue,—has obviously some reason for personal satisfaction to mingle with his sense of personal demerit. But the other man, for whom nothing could be urged by way of personal appeal to the prerogative, and who, therefore, was pardoned solely in consideration of something out of himself,—something provided by unmerited favour, and pleaded with humble dependence,—this man has obviously but one feeling, that of conscious unworthiness, unqualified by the least portion of that of complacency.

### III.

So far, we seem very distinctly to have ascertained that there are two kinds of justification; one, in which a man is treated as what he is; another, in which he is treated as what he is not. By leaving the consideration of the first of these, and limiting our attention to the second, we have farther ascertained that there are two grounds on which this last kind of justification may be conferred; one, arising directly from

the individual himself; another, out of himself, arising from foreign interference in his favour. Now, in proceeding with the subject, we shall leave the first of these grounds of justification, just as we formerly left the first kind of justification itself, and, limiting our attention to the second, attempt a remark or two, respecting that, still more specific and particular.

This ground of justification is supposed to be something graciously provided by government itself, in order to harmonize the personal and official character of the governors. Those who represent and execute the law have, properly speaking, in their official character, no feeling; though, in their personal character, they may be remarkable for possessing it. In the one, too, their course is imperatively prescribed to them, and, in pursuing it, they would act in perfect consistency with rectitude; yet, in the other, they can easily be supposed, on some peculiar occasion, to wish, if it were possible, to depart from the exact letter of the law, and yet to maintain and illustrate its spirit; and thus, by the institution of some extraordinary measure, to be able to extend mercy to an offender, without appearing to sanction or palliate the offence. All this, I feel quite certain, is perfectly conceivable; and the principle it involves has, I think, been illustrated by facts. With-

out, however, entering at present into the separate question of the propriety of such an attempt at compromise on the part of a government, let us suppose the attempt made, and the measure determined, and a document actually handed to the offender stating to him the ground on which pardon may be obtained; or, if you prefer the phraseology, the terms and conditions of his justification. Suppose all this, and then attend to the force of the two following observations respecting it.

In the first place. It seems obvious, that the first inquiry with the man, circumstanced as we describe, is, not the philosophy of the measure, but the fact of it. It is for him to ascertain *what* the government has selected for the accomplishment of the proposed purpose, and not *why* they have selected it. Those, invested with the sovereign power, are to be supposed best acquainted with what the emergency demands; to know best what is most consistent with the principles, and most conducive to the ends, of government, and to have a right, therefore, to select any means whatever which a regard to these suggests, and which *they* see it becoming to appoint; and all that the criminal has to do, is, to be satisfied, by the proper authorities, that such or such a means *is* appointed, and then to acquiesce in it, with a perfect conviction of its

wisdom, and to trust it, with a perfect confidence of its efficiency. It appears unnecessary for the man fully to understand all the reasons of state that led to the appointment. The benefit to be derived from an appeal to the prerogative does not depend upon this. There may be reasons which he cannot comprehend; reasons arising from the nature of the government, or the nature of the law, or the condition of other subjects of the empire, all which it may be impossible for him to know or to appreciate until he actually mingles among these other subjects themselves, and learns more, both of the law and of the government, than he has time, or power, or opportunity to do while a prisoner. It would seem, therefore, that without perplexing himself about the *rationale* of the measure proposed to him, he should have recourse to it just as it is; recourse to it as a fact, which, as such, it is possible to confide in, though as an appointment it may be impossible to explain it. The *why* of the thing may be a mystery, but the *what* of it is no mystery. This he can understand as a truth; he can plead it as a truth; upon the authority of the official document; he can feel confident that the plea will prevail with those to whom it is addressed, because *they*, he knows, perfectly understand it; and thus he may derive the



advantage he seeks, though he sees not precisely how it is obtained; just as, relying on the skill of a physician, he can use a medicine prescribed by him, and derive from it every advantage, though he knows nothing of its separate ingredients, the proportions in which they are combined, nor the mode in which the whole is intended to act upon the different parts of the animal economy.

But, in the second place, it is to be observed, that this last analogy is rather deceptive. There is a difference between natural and moral medicine. The one operates by mechanical force; the other by rational persuasion. There is to be expected, therefore, in any thing intended to influence and benefit the mind, a real adaptation to its functions and nature. Hence, in the case supposed, though the efficacy of any plea might, in relation to the person benefited, be resolved, as above, into the appointment of the supreme power, and shown to depend more upon the simple confidence of the prisoner in the wisdom and faithfulness of government, than upon his personal discernment of the reason of its acts; yet, it seems equally obvious, that, under an intelligent government, this efficiency would, in relation to *it*, ultimately spring from some inherent propriety in the plea itself. In the selection of the supposed mea-

sure, it is evident *that* would be preferred by which the ends sought might be most eminently accomplished. Wise men would not appoint any thing merely from caprice,—merely to show their supremacy and independence. In the case we are imagining, the persons have an intelligent aim and purpose : they are supposed, from their personal benevolence, to be anxious to depart, in their official capacity, from the exact letter of the law, and yet to maintain and illustrate its spirit ; and thus, by the institution of some extraordinary measure, to be able to extend mercy to an offender without appearing to sanction or palliate the offence. From this it is evident that the measure, whatever it be, cannot be one merely arbitrary ; one, deriving its importance and power, altogether from the fact of its appointment. Surely, something would be preferred that should have in itself a rational propriety ; something that should be seen to be capable of influencing the operations of government ; something that might act, by way of natural consequence, upon the mind of the prisoner, impressing him with the flagrancy of his offence, the majesty of the law, the regard to rectitude, as well as to compassion, of those invested with the supreme authority. It is reasonable, I say, to suppose that something possessing such properties would be employed ;



and that they would be perceived to belong to it by the persons to whom it was proposed; and, then, so far as these were understood, the reasons for the choice of the appointment would be understood. It would still be true, however, as before asserted, that the efficiency of the plea would not depend upon the apprehension by the prisoner of these reasons. That efficiency would, in respect to the government, arise from the inherent propriety of the appointment itself; and, in respect to the man, from his personal trust in it, in consequence of his believing the assurances of government. But, the man's perceiving the nature, and understanding the reasons of the appointment, would, in the first place, be a rational inducement to the exercise of trust; and, in the second place, it would thus come to pass, that, the very exercise of mind necessary to pardon would be favourable to virtue, as the properties perceived in the ground of that pardon, would be seen to constitute the strongest motives to subsequent obedience.

#### IV.

We now terminate this train of consecutive illustrations by one concluding remark, — a remark to which we seem to be brought as

to the natural winding up of the whole subject. Suppose all that we have imagined as actually taking place ; suppose that the case of an offender excited (from whatever cause) the interest described, and led to the benevolent provision of some extrinsic ground of appeal, in consideration of which, mercy might be dispensed ; suppose that the knowledge of this was conveyed to him, by some official and intelligible document, stating the fact, explaining the nature of the professed ground of dependence, and pledging the government to regard an appeal founded upon it. Suppose this ;—and then suppose farther, that, believing the document to be authentic, and the facts and promises contained in it to be true, the person acted upon its suggestions, sought and secured the boon ; in this case, a case altogether secular, I should say that the man *was justified by faith* ; in other words, that he obtained pardon by means of his belief of the testimony of government.—He had been proved and pronounced a flagrant offender ; by this he was necessarily exposed to punishment ; it was utterly impossible for him to be justified by law ; it was equally impossible for him to be justified by favour, merely in consequence of an appeal to the prerogative, or in consideration of his possessing any balancing attributes of virtue ; yet, through his confidence

in a certain communication tendered him by government, the otherwise impossible object is accomplished. He trusts the promise; he urges the plea; he directs, so to speak, the eye of the executive from the contemplation of himself, to the contemplation of the ground, upon which it is asserted, and upon which he feels, a full pardon may be equitably dispensed. The consideration prevails; the plea is admitted; the pardon is given; by this he is virtually placed in the condition, and clothed with the character, of one who has vindicated and established his personal virtue; he is regarded and treated *as if he were* just; his offence becomes, as to its direct consequences, *as if* it had never been; he is proclaimed free; he is shielded from punishment; he is *pardoned*—he is *justified*—he is justified *by faith*.

## SERMON XIII.

### JUSTIFICATION.

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HEB. XI. 8—19.

*By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and*

*pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things, declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.*

IN our discourse last sabbath, it was proposed to wind up the whole of our observations respecting Abraham, by a few brief remarks on the great doctrine, which his history is so frequently employed to illustrate. The order in which these remarks were to be submitted to you, was thus stated. We shall attempt—"first, to exhibit what justification is, and how it may be obtained among men, together with a description of the feelings occasioned by the different kinds of it, and the natural effects of these on subsequent conduct: *next*, to show how the mode and the results of a sinner's justification with God, tally with these: *and then*, to endeavour to detect the point of coincidence, between this New Testament view of the matter, and

that involved in the account of the ‘father of the faithful.’”

The first part of this plan was alone entered upon last Lord’s day ; it will now be attempted to complete it by advancing to those that remain. We proceed, therefore, without further remark, to the application of the principles, illustrated in our former discourse, to the matter of man’s justification with God. In doing this, we shall briefly refer to these principles in the order in which they were stated or established, and endeavour to ascertain in what way the Scriptures authorize their application to ourselves.

### I.

You were informed—that justification is a term taken from judicial proceedings ; that it presupposes an examination into conduct by comparing it with the requirements of some law ; that it is of two kinds, proper and improper, or, in other words, that it may be obtained by right, or by favour : it was explained, that, by the first of these was intended, a person’s being proved to be, literally and in fact, what the law requires ; and, by the second, the treatment of a person *as if he were*, though proved *not* to be, literally and in fact, what the law requires. It was further shown that,



though justification in both senses came virtually to the same thing, the feelings accompanying the one were very different from those accompanying the other.

In proceeding to examine in what way these and other observations and principles formerly mentioned, are, according to Scripture, applicable to us, I take for granted two things, namely, the Divine existence and the Divine government; that there is a God, and that there is a law according to which God conducts the affairs of the moral universe;—a law, to which all his intelligent creatures ought to conform, and by which, if he please, they can at any time be examined. Both these points might be supported by many arguments, but we assume them, because we assume the truth of Revelation, and in this latter assumption the former appears to be contained.

We assume, then, the Divine existence and the Divine government. Of this government we are subjects. As such, we ought to be conformed to the Divine law. Our conduct may be examined by comparing it with the requirements of that law. Those requirements may be reduced to the inculcation of one great general principle—"thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and thy neigh

bour as thyself." Now, the question is, supposing such examination and comparison to be instituted respecting us, *what would be the result?* If it should be proved that we are, literally and in fact, all that the law requires, we obtain, of course, justification-proper,—justification by right. If it should be proved that we are *not*, literally and in fact, all that the law requires, then, it will be obvious, that we stand in need of justification by favour.

Now, we have nothing to do with *supposing* what would be the result of this inquiry. In this discourse we suppose nothing. Our business is to receive testimony,—testimony assumed to be true. "What saith the Scripture?" What is the response of the infallible oracle to this *first* question submitted to its decision?—"The whole world lieth in wickedness." "All have gone out of the way." "There is not a just man that liveth and sinneth not." "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.—If we say that we have not sinned, we make him (God) a liar, and his word is not in us." "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." "As it is written, there is none righteous, no not one—that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no

flesh be justified in his sight." It would be difficult to find language more direct or conclusive than this. If words have any meaning, we are here furnished with a full and unequivocal answer to our first inquiry. Here is an explicit and universal charge of sinfulness against us. Here is also the distinct statement of the consequence, in respect to justification, which this necessarily involves, namely, that the first kind of it is, as to every one of us, utterly out of the question; it is an impossibility; not a single individual can be justified by right,—by being proved to be, literally and in fact, what the law requires; the contrary is ready to be established against the whole world; if, therefore, that world, or any part of it, is justified at all, it must be by justification of favour.

From this it appears that the feelings of the man who triumphantly sustains an examination into conduct, and who walks forth with the confidence of vindicated virtue, never can be ours. To make the analogy bear upon our spiritual relation to God, perhaps we might say, that, we are for ever shut out from a participation of the feeling of those intelligences, who "kept their first estate;" who, supposing they were tried by any positive appointment, bore the trial, whatever it might be; who thus evinced their regard to the whole law, and, of course, dis-

played in moral character an entire conformity to all its requisitions ; who presented, therefore, to the eye of God, on comparing their conduct with the requirements of the law, a perfect counterpart of the law itself ; who were consequently proved and pronounced to be, literally and in fact, all that it demanded ; who thus obtained justification-proper ; were declared free from sin—free also, of course, from liability to punishment—and hence entitled to whatever was attached to personal obedience or successful probation.—From all sympathy with beings so circumstanced, we, the above Scriptures assert, are completely and for ever excluded. *Such* justification, and such feelings as flow from it, never can be ours.

## II.

You were next informed, in the last discourse, that, not only are there two kinds of justification, but two ways in which the last kind of it may be obtained. The first of these was described to be something arising immediately and directly from the man himself ; the second, something out of himself, arising from foreign interference in his favour. Let us examine upon which of these the word of God directs us to depend, applying, as we advance, the



various principles and reasonings, which, under the former illustration of each, were adverted to or pursued.

In the first place, justification-improper, or secondary, that is, pardon, may be obtained or dispensed in consideration of some ground or reason arising directly from the offender himself; from his previously good character, from his penitence, from his promise of amendment, or his humble and earnest appeal to the prerogative. Such facts and circumstances as these, may certainly prevail at times with a government to remit the penalty incurred by disobedience, and, of course, to confer justification by favour. Especially may this be expected in cases where the offence is trivial, or where there may be a doubt of the perfect propriety of the law. Now, the question is, may we apply *this* as the proper analogy to the case of man and his Maker? Are we authorized to expect pardon on any such grounds and considerations?

A thousand voices reply, "Certainly." "Why not?" "Surely, in examining and judging of character, it would be unfair to neglect the best and brightest parts of it, and inequitable not to balance the evil and the good?" "It never can be supposed that God will condemn a man, uniformly amiable and virtuous, for a few sins;

or that, in any instance he will act without making proper allowance for human weakness?" "If we are sorry for the past, and ask to be forgiven, and reform and improve, what more can possibly be required?" "My son, or my servant, acknowledges his fault, and I forgive him,—am I better than God?" "It is monstrous to think our imperfections can appear so aggravated and immense; or that any law which makes them appear so, should be approved or executed by the bountiful Father of all mankind!"

Now, all this reasoning might be met *by reasoning*. It might be shown, that there is much to lead us to suspect that *sin* is by no means so trivial a matter as these speakers represent; (that it *is* trivial, or comparatively so, is, you may observe, the assumption on which the whole of their observations proceed.) Then, supposing it to possess the character of a grave, or, let us say, a capital, offence, it might be urged, that one such offence is sufficient, in human governments, to expose to punishment a person in every other respect virtuous; that repentance, entreaty, and so on, cannot, in such cases, be admitted; for, having no reflex operation on the past, and being incapable, therefore, of altering the fact of the offence, they are insufficient to authorize a



departure from the law. It might be said, that a father or master may do what a judge or governor cannot; that even *they* do not always so easily pass over disobedience; and that to conceive of God *merely* as sustaining to his creatures the parental relation, is a partial, and therefore an illogical and false, view of his character, of our relation to *Him*, and of his to us, and, if admitted as a principle in moral reasoning, must lead to absurd and pernicious conclusions. Then, again, it might further be said, that there is this difference, unquestionably great, between law, human and divine, namely, that, while doubts may often be justly entertained of the propriety of the one, the perfect, eternal, immutable propriety of the other never can be doubted; that, therefore, any thing like arbitrary departure from it by Deity, is inconceivable, because it would be wrong; that its sanctions must, of course, be as proper as itself; and that it must be right for God to execute, whatever it is right for God to denounce. Besides, it might be suggested, that the punishment of sin is not, properly speaking, *executed*; that is, that it requires no exertion of *power* on the part of God, but that it is rather to be regarded as the direct and necessary result of sin itself upon intelligent and moral natures, which, probably, could not, as such, have been

constituted differently in relation to sin; that, therefore, no punishment awaiting sin can possibly be disproportioned to the offence, for it is nothing else but just the unavoidable perpetuation, and the evolving, so to speak, of the offence itself; hence, what is to be positively *done* on the part of God, what requires the exertion of *power*, in the case of offenders, is, not the infliction or the execution of punishment, but, it is the interrupting, by miracle, of the established and necessary laws that govern the spiritual, intelligent, and moral universe; and then, as an inference from all this, it might be observed, that it is at least *doubtful* whether any thing suggested by the above speakers, amounts to an adequate consideration to induce God to work such a miracle. It might still further be urged, that the voice of humanity, the testimony of our own nature, intelligibly expressed in religious rites, is directly and universally opposed to the preceding assumptions; that the superstitions of all ages and countries, however different in some respects, always had one common character, in that they were adapted to guilt, not innocence; and included sacrifices, sufferings, and so on, as grounds of forgiveness, and considerations to propitiate,—just as if the heart, when not misled by the understanding,—as if men, uncorrupted by rea-

soning, unsophisticated by philosophy, had an instinctive consciousness that *something else* was essential to pardon besides the expressions of penitence or prayer.

I merely observe, that this, and much more than this, *might* be said, by way of argumentatively meeting what was supposed to be argumentatively advanced. But the fact is, that reasoning, argument, is, on either side, at present, altogether improper. We are not now reasoning on general principles; we are not seeking by argument the establishment or discovery of certain truths; we are receiving evidence, we are listening to testimony. We have to do, not with what we think, but with what we read; the question is not what we fancy *we* can prove to be rational, but what we find *God* has pronounced to be right. However mysterious, therefore, it may seem, however irreconcilable to just reasoning, for violations of divine law to be pardoned on account of the offender's other virtues, or on account of his penitence, reformation, or entreaty; yet, if the Scriptures really assert that these, separately or combined, constitute God's selected ground of justification by favour, then, let reason do homage to faith, and let us reverently admit the sacred fact, however repugnant it may seem to our philosophy.

Thus we are brought back to the inquiry,

to which, indeed, we are rigidly bound down, "What saith the Scripture?" "What is the response of the infallible oracle to this *second* question submitted to its decision?"

In ascertaining the reply of the "faithful and true witness," it is important to observe, that *all* the declarations or evidence of that witness must be heard. The answer is not obtained by its being shown that such and such things, (what have been mentioned for instance), are required, unless it also be shown that *nothing else* is required. We must hear the witness out, remembering that they only who, on any question, possess the *whole* truth, possess *the* truth. The greater includes the less; the admission therefore of the greater, is not the denial of the less, but the admission *only* of the less *is* the denial of the greater. It is granted, a part of truth *is* truth, but, it may operate with the malignity of error if it be mistaken for the whole; this mistake is error, and the truth, whatever it be, associated with such mistake, will operate, in the mind that admits it, according to this secondary conception; it will thus lose its proper character, have its relation to the rest of truth destroyed, and really become an error; for, it will be taken for what it is *not*, that is, it will be, virtually, a delusion and a falsehood. These positions are self-evident. It is



important to regard them in all inquiries, philosophical, scientific, or sacred. It is important to regard them now.

What, then, saith the Scripture? that is, seeing that man needs a pardon, and pardon may be dispensed on two grounds, the first of which is, something arising directly and immediately from the offender himself, his virtue, penitence, reformation, and so on, what saith it as to these things? Does it say that these things are necessary? does it say that nothing else is necessary? or, which is the same thing, but less direct, is it simply *silent*, giving no intimation of, uttering no allusion to, any other thing as essential to constitute the ground of forgiveness? The thousand voices whose *reasonings* we have already heard, would reply to these questions by thousands of *quotations*, in which, not virtue, perhaps, but repentance, is required as preliminary to pardon. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." "O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great." "I said, I will confess my transgression unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God,

for he will abundantly pardon." "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." And so on.

Now, to all this what is to be objected? Nothing. We have no objection, we dare not object, to any thing proceeding from the infallible oracle. This proceeds from it; it is therefore truth. The question is, Is it the *whole* truth, or only a *part* of it? It will be quite conclusive, if it be the entire evidence; if the witness, whose testimony we are obtaining, has nothing farther to advance. But, if there *be* something farther; if any thing additional is stated; any thing not of the nature of a mental feeling or moral act on the part of man, but something effected independently of him, whatever it may be; this, and this alone, will contain or complete the response to the proposed inquiry. Let the evidence proceed. "Without shedding of blood is no remission." "The blood of Jesus Christ—cleanseth us from all sin." "Repent—and believe the gospel." Preaching "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." "God was in Christ, reconciling the



world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.—He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” Ye are “redeemed—with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” “This is—my blood, shed for many for the remission of sins.” “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” “He is the propitiation for our sins.” “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish.” “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish.” “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood,—that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth.” And so on.

Now, it is to be observed, that all this is as really a part of scripture testimony as what was previously adduced. It is additional, not contradictory to the other. It is quoted, not to explain *what it is* on account of which man obtains pardon (we have not come to that yet), but merely to show, that *something else* is essential to the object, besides what may exist in himself. It is utterly impossible that these passages could have been written by persons who

had no idea beyond certain feelings or acts on the part of man, and forgiveness on the part of God. Here are distinct and intelligible intimations of something which man did not do,—something out of himself, whatever it may prove to be, as necessary to his enjoying justification by favour. We consider, therefore, this *second* inquiry to be clearly and unequivocally answered. It is plain, that the first ground of pardon, like the first kind of justification, must be given up; the one is insufficient, as the other is unattainable.

Nor is this all. The passages adduced will warrant a still stronger mode of expression than any yet employed. The *nature* of the insufficiency which scripture appears to attach to what we term the personal ground of secondary justification, is to be observed. It is insufficiency, not of degree but of kind; not comparative, but absolute. That is to say, the meaning of the oracle seems to be, not that those personal acts and emotions, to which we have referred, and which it demands, are insufficient to secure pardon in such a sense, that *with* the something else to which it alludes, they will, altogether, *be* sufficient,—thus attributing to them a certain portion of direct and effective influence in securing the boon; but, it seems to be, that the direct and effective influence belongs to that

something else, exclusively and alone; and that those personal emotions and acts are demanded for some other purpose; that they have a propriety and a use distinct from what would be involved in their constituting a part of the consideration on account of which pardon is conferred; for, if they did this, they would become entitled, that is, they would entitle man, to a part of the glory and lustre of the achievement. You will see the truth and the force of these remarks, perhaps, by noticing what the language is, and what it is not, in which some of the most important statements of scripture, relating to the matter, are conveyed. It is true that repentance, and reformation, and earnest supplications for mercy are required, and, without these, it is represented that the benefit of that something on which pardon depends is certainly not obtained; but it is obvious that all these things are spoken of in a very different way, and are represented as very different in nature, from that something itself; and it is intimated that they are regarded as possessing a very different sort of worth, and are contemplated by God in a very different light, from *it*. Assuming that faith, as the simple reception and corresponding impression of the testimony of God, cannot possibly have in it any thing of the nature of a meritorious work, then, it will be

may be thus stated. You were informed, that, in just and legitimate governments, the *Law* reigns; that, those who represent and execute it, are required to act according to law; that, they may be considered as possessing both a personal and official character, in the one of which, they have certain feelings, and in the other, certain functions and duties; that, it may happen, therefore, in cases of flagrant offence, that, however personally they might compassionate the criminal, and desire to save him, they may, officially, be utterly unable to do so, because, such a course, though agreeable to their feelings as men, would be inconsistent with their obligations and duties as governors; a case, however, was imagined, in which their desire to do this was supposed to be so strong, as to lead, first, to the suspension of punishments, and, then, to the adoption of some extraordinary measure, which, being appealed to by the guilty, should be admitted as a valid ground for the exercise of the prerogative. This was represented as the provision of something out of a man's self, as the ground of his justification; it was described as being intended to warrant a departure from the exact letter of the law, yet maintaining and illustrating its spirit; that thus the executive, or supreme presiding power of the state, might be able to extend



mercy to an offender, without appearing to sanction or palliate his offence; in other words, it is the opening of a way for the exercise of the prerogative, not merely *as* prerogative, that is, not merely as an act of personal pleasure and irresponsible will, but an act, which, judged of by the principle of law, should be seen to be satisfactory to and confirmatory of that principle. Then, you were further informed, that, supposing such a course as this adopted, and proposed to be acted upon, with respect to an offender, two things were to be remarked; *first*, that, in such a case, all the offender had to do was, to ascertain *what* was appointed to meet the emergency, and not *why* that particular thing, whatever it might be, was specifically selected; for, its efficacy, in relation to him, would, it was observed, rest on his simple reception of and appeal to it as a fact: *second*, that still, as its efficacy, in relation to the government, must be supposed to result, not from its mere appointment, (for if so, it would resolve itself, after all, into an act of mere will, and, in relation to the government, would be the same as if it had appointed nothing,)—as its efficacy, then, in this relation, must be supposed to result from some inherent power and propriety in the thing itself, it was observed, that it might be expected to be so far understood by those to

whom it was proposed, as to permit them to see, to a certain extent, in what way it did harmonize the personal and official character of those who sustained and exercised the supreme authority; and thus, also, be adapted to operate, by way of natural consequence, on the improvement of the prisoner, making the very exercise of mind necessary to pardon favourable to virtue, and constituting in itself the strongest motive to subsequent obedience. It was then added, by way of winding up the whole argument, that, supposing this to be done by a government, and intelligence of it to be authoritatively communicated to a guilty person, and he, in consequence, to appeal to and plead it, then, it was remarked, that, in such a case, a case entirely secular, the man would really be justified by faith.

In proceeding with the present discourse, the question then, you perceive, again recurs, "What saith the Scripture?" that is, what saith it, as to the bearing of these principles and observations on the case of man and his Maker? What is the response of the infallible oracle to this *last* question submitted to its decision? Now, though it is obvious there is here much room for illustrative quotation and remark, yet, I really do think, that very few words may suffice to put us in possession of all



that is absolutely necessary to be said; for the inquiry has, in a great measure, been answered already; the testimony given on the former questions, did, in answering them, inform us that the above principles are recognized, and have been acted upon, in the Divine government; and it did also, along with this, include the statement of facts coincident in design, nature, and tendency, with those described, or, if you choose, imagined. The view, however, of the principles and facts in speculation and action; the analogy between the supposed and the real case, the secular and the spiritual, may be briefly exhibited thus:

Recollect and carefully weigh the import of the testimony of Scripture already adduced, and see if it does not include the recognition of such principles, and the statement of such facts as these:—that God's moral government of mankind is government according to law; that the governor is not a despot regulating the affairs of his great empire by mere will; that he is to be regarded, therefore, as actually sustaining an official character, recognizing and respecting its obligations and duties, as well as possessing a personal character, with its sensibility and feeling; that sin is a grave and capital offence; that, therefore, however, personally, God may compassionate the sinner, the arbi-

trary remission of punishment is, officially, impossible.—I am much mistaken if you do not almost intuitively perceive that these *principles* are involved in, and give its significancy and point to the scriptural evidence already before you. The following *facts* are also stated, more or less directly, in the course of it;—that God has compared the conduct and character of men with the requirements of law, and pronounced them offenders; that, therefore, men, as offenders, stand exposed to the punishment attached to disobedience; that the infliction of that punishment is, however, graciously suspended; and that, in the mean time, an extraordinary measure has actually been adopted for the purpose of providing what may be appealed to by man as a valid ground for the dispensation of pardon. Nothing can be plainer, in my opinion, than that these facts are asserted by the scripture testimony already heard.

It is thus ascertained, then, that *something* has been appointed by God, independently of man altogether, which is to be the ground of his justification, if ever he is justified at all. What we have to do now, therefore, is, to notice the bearing upon this, of the two observations before submitted, respecting the imagined case of such a measure being adopted by a human government.

As to the first observation relating to the *fact* of the appointment irrespective of the *rationale* of it, a very brief remark or two will suffice. We may put it thus. Since there is a certain something appointed, to which I, as a guilty man, am to look; to which I am to refer, so to speak, Him at whose tribunal I stand; and which, thus appealed to, will be admitted, it is promised, as an adequate ground for the exercise of mercy towards me; tell me *what* that something is, and I will employ and urge it, confiding in *his* perception of its propriety and power, even though, personally, I should be unable to perceive *why* it is efficient.—To this demand the Scripture reply is direct; and it includes, too, an instructive allusion illustrative of the course here promised to be pursued. As to the reply; it is contained in such statements as these,—“the blood of Jesus Christ—cleanseth us from all sin.” “In whom we have redemption through his blood, *even* the forgiveness of sins.” “God *sent* forth his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin,” or a sin-offering. “He who knew no sin *was made* sin,” or a sin-offering, “for us.” “Sacrifice and offering,” (which are offered by the law), “thou wouldest not; but a body hast thou prepared me:—lo, I come to do thy will, O God!—by the which will we are sanctified,”—

(that is, separated—separated from the guilty, who stand exposed to punishment, and contemplated as pardoned and saved,)—"through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*." "Without shedding of blood there is no remission;"—we are redeemed (punishment is remitted, we are pardoned or justified) by "the precious blood of Christ." And so on. Now, these and similar passages, I regard as constituting an explicit and intelligible reply to the demand just made. *That thing*, it appears, on account, or in consideration, of which pardon is granted to man, is the death of Messiah or the Christ. Whatever secondary or additional ideas may be necessary to explain the fact, *this is the fact*: as such, it has power with God as the representative, in his official character, of law, whether we see *how* it has it or not. And, now, by way of showing how it may be efficient with respect to man, even though nothing more were to be known but this, we shall quote and illustrate the allusion adverted to above.

This allusion is contained in these words; "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." You all know the historical fact here referred to. The



people had sinned. They were punished by poisonous serpents being sent among them. The necessary consequence of being bitten by these was death. Nothing could save them but some direct, we might say miraculous, interposition which should cut off the connexion between the poison and its consequences—the cause and the effect. For this purpose, Moses was divinely directed to elevate a brazen serpent upon a pole, and to assure the sufferers that all who looked upon it should immediately be healed. Now, in the same way, Christ, it is said, was, by crucifixion, lifted up from the earth, that all who spiritually look to him might spiritually live. In neither case, you observe, thus stated, is there any account of the *rationale* of the thing. There is just a fact and a promise,—the divine appointment and the divine pledge. And, to see the efficiency of these in relation to man, notwithstanding his ignorance of the former, attend to the following supposition of what *might* have occurred in the Hebrew camp, and apply it as we proceed to the christian argument.

Conceive of an Israelite reasoning and acting thus: “I cannot comprehend this singular appointment. What possible connexion is there between my looking at this object, and my obtaining the promised advantage? I see not how either

the object itself, or my regard to it, can prevail with God miraculously to interpose between me and death. Why should there be this appointment or this requisition at all? Why may not God hear and answer my prayer addressed directly to himself, altogether irrespective of this, — addressed with earnest urgency, and prompted by sincere contrition? Surely this appeal is more likely to be successful; it cannot be denied; it is more rational in itself, and more consistent with just views of *his* character, who is rich in mercy and ready to pardon! I will arise and go to him. I have sinned; I am suffering; I am dying: but, I will approach even unto his seat; I will enter the sanctuary itself; I will prostrate myself before the Lord; I will entreat him to forgive the iniquity of my sin, and to remove the burden beneath which I groan." Well; this man might go, and might do what he had determined; he might go and offer his earnest and fervent supplication: but, do you think God would hear that prayer? Do you think this kind of devotion would be accepted, or this appeal successful? that is, do you believe that these personal considerations would be sufficient to induce God to work the proposed miracle? Certainly not. The poison would continue to penetrate, and pervade, and burn, even while



he was prostrate before God in the sanctuary; and there, perhaps, he might die; and, though dying in such a place and in such an exercise, he would appear in the Divine presence, as fresh from the act and attitude of sin! Now, *another* Israelite, just as ignorant as this first man, of the adaptation, reason, and so on, of the appointment, but who believed the testimony respecting it, confided in the promise, and had recourse to it as a fact, leaving the perception of its sufficiency for the end proposed, to Him who had appointed it; this person, would look—and live. The resemblance between the physical and spiritual appointment you can detect for yourselves. It is perfect, and beautiful, and instructive. It fully illustrates the present observation; and with the assurance that you will see this, we leave it for the next.

In noticing this next and last point, we observe, that there are scriptural testimonies of a somewhat different character from those hitherto adduced, and that even some of those may be viewed as establishing *more* than they have yet been employed to prove; that is to say, the response of the infallible oracle, when fully considered, will be found not only to state the *fact* which is appointed to constitute the ground of pardon, but also to explain, in some

measure, *how* it is so : there are included in it unquestionable intimations respecting the necessity, and design, and reason, and nature, and so on, of the appointment itself; the properties which impart to it its influence, in relation to God; and the power it is adapted to exert on the virtue of man. All that is necessary to be said on this and kindred matters, by way of applying the observations, formerly advanced, may be comprehended, I think, in the following portions of scripture testimony and illustrative remark.

In the first place. The previous question of the propriety of a government,—those who represent and execute the law, and exercise the supreme power, in a state—the previous question, of the propriety of such persons voluntarily providing that, which should warrant in themselves a departure from the exact letter of the law, and allow the pardon of capital offenders ;—this, in relation to the divine government, is settled,—settled in the affirmative, by the evidence already heard, which says, that God has actually done it, actually, and of himself, done a certain something to take away the guilt of the world ; and whatever he has done in fact, must be right in principle. Then, that God's doing this, originated from the circumstance of his possessing a personal, and sustaining an

official character; and that it was intended to harmonize each with the other, and both with law; this, too, I conceive to be stated by the witness. "God is love"—"God is a consuming fire." "God desires not the death of the wicked"—"God hateth the workers of iniquity." Now God could not be and do, both these, in the same sense, or, in the same character; and he could not act exclusively, in either character, without destroying the other: and if both were to be regarded, there would be a *necessity* for some extraordinary measure or arrangement, to effect such an end; and this, I imagine, is referred to in such passages as the following:—"It *behoved* Christ to suffer." "It *became* God, in bringing sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."—Further, that the measure *originated* in the personal, and was intended to *illustrate* the official character of God; that, in fact, it illustrates both, and imparts to the intelligent universe, higher conceptions of the divine glory, than if he had acted exclusively in either; these statements, I think, are sustained by *this* testimony:—"God so loved the world,—even when dead in sins,—that he sent his Son—to reconcile it to himself." "God hath set forth his Son, a propitiation, to declare, or display, his righteousness; that he might be just, (be seen to be just,) and

the justifier of him that believeth." "He is a just God and a Saviour." "He hath abounded (in his conduct in this matter) in all wisdom and prudence;" and hence there is displayed, to "principalities and powers, in heavenly places, by the church, (by the means of which it is the result, and which constitute and keep it what it is,) the manifold wisdom of God." Then, again, as to the nature of those means, and their mode of operation, or, in other words, the way in which the measure alluded to influences the operations of government, it is represented thus;—Christ "gave himself a ransom." "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." He died "the just for the unjust." More particularly, giving what we take to be the *sense* of the passage—"He who knew no sin, was, on our account, treated as if he were a sinner; that we, who are sinners, might, on his account, be treated as if we were righteous." And, that this should be the case,—that the work of Christ, (as the whole of what Messiah did and suffered is often comprehensively termed,) that this should appear to the mind of God an adequate reason for the merciful treatment of, that is, for the conferring of secondary justification upon, those that trust in him,—is intimated in scripture to arise from two circumstances,



namely, the dignity and the innocence of him who bore (in their effects) "our sins in his own body on the tree." These two circumstances are *asserted* thus,—“The Word,” (described as “the Word that was in the beginning with God, and was God,”) “the Word, was made flesh and dwelt among us.” “He humbled himself,” “and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” “He took not on him the nature of angels; but he took—the seed of Abraham,” “the likeness of sinful flesh,” yet he was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” He was “without blemish.” He was “the Just One.” The facts and properties thus asserted, are *argued* from, by the apostle, in this way,—establishing the point at present before us,—“If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctify to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works;” that is, from the burden, the guilt, and condemnation of works that deserve death, namely, *sins*.

From all that has been advanced, in order to ascertain how far “the faithful and true witness” warrants the application of the principles

formerly stated to the subject of its own testimony—from all this, it does seem that scripture, as might be expected, explains, in some measure, the nature, and propriety, and mode of operation, of that appointment, by means of which mercy is granted to man. It appears that a divinely glorious and immaculately holy person, denominated the Son of God, voluntarily “came into our world,” “in the likeness of men;” that he did homage to law, both by obeying it himself, and by sustaining towards it the relation of answerableness for those who did not; that, being regarded in that relation, “it pleased the Lord to bruise him;” and to “put him to grief,” and to “make his soul an offering for sin;” that thus, the letter of the law was departed from, but in such a manner that the spirit and principle of it was most eminently maintained and illustrated; and that hence, on this account, the law itself can consent to the justification of an offender; or God, in his official character, can consistently remit the punishment of those who plead the transaction as the ground of forgiveness. All this can be ascertained from scripture, and it can be comprehended. It may be understood as well as believed. And hence it is possible to apply the last idea previously suggested, respecting the very process of pardon being favourable



to virtue. This is both distinctly asserted by scripture, and may be seen to follow by way of natural consequence. Christ "loved us" and "laid down his life for us." This is the fact. Then the moral influence of the fact is thus stated:—"The love of Christ *constraineth* us—to live—not to ourselves—but to Him who died for us and rose again." We "are bought with a price," therefore "not being our own," we are to glorify him "who bought us," "in our body and spirit which are his;" and this can only be done by showing that that "grace which bringeth salvation," teaches us to deny "ungodliness and worldly lusts," and to "live soberly, righteously, and godly;" because, this is the end proposed to be accomplished by Him who redeemed his people, "that he might sanctify and cleanse" them, and make them "a peculiar people, zealous of good works." In short, so directly is the ground of our forgiveness intended to operate upon virtue, and so adapted to do it, by way of natural consequence, from the view which it gives of the sinfulness of sin, the excellence of law, and the attractions of holiness; and by the love and gratitude it excites towards God, prompting the desire, and rendering it easy to obey and resemble Him; that those who, professing the truth, are *not* virtuous, are represented as the enemies, not

simply of the precepts and the example, but of the “*cross*, of Christ.”

It would have been easy to have enlarged upon all the topics thus briefly adverted to, and to have quoted additional passages under each. If, however, the principles intended to be illustrated and sustained, are really recognized, implied or asserted, in those produced, it is enough. One scriptural statement is as conclusive as ten; the thing, whatever it be, is in the Record, and must, therefore, of necessity be received. It may be as well to remind you, too, that it has already been shown, that it is no answer to say that other lower and lesser things are spoken of in connexion with this subject. The greater includes the less. Those who admit the greater can admit the less, and can harmonize each with the other, because they are in possession of a principle adequate to account, so to speak, for *all* the phenomena of the whole of Revelation. It is an axiom in theology, as well as in physics, that no more principles are to be admitted than what are necessary to account for appearances; but then, it is also an axiom, that *as many* must be admitted as *are* necessary. Now, we do think, that by the view we have taken of the present subject, every thing contained in scripture is explicable; while, by any thing

short of it, much, very much, must remain mysterious.

On the whole, the Scriptures seem to decide, that the ground of man's justification as a subject of God's moral government, is of the nature of the *second* ground of justification by favour. It appears, too, that its inherent properties and practical power are similar in kind to what would be required by right reason, in a correspondent process in human affairs.

#### IV.

In winding up the whole matter, and observing how it is that we become interested in the proposed blessing, we have only to repeat, in a spiritual sense, the observations which formed the conclusion of the last discourse. An authentic document is placed before us, making known this appointed and appropriate ground of justification; directing us to depend upon and plead it; explaining so much as is necessary to constitute a rational inducement to our doing so; and including positive assurances of our finding it sufficient. We believe this; that is, we believe—not something *about* or *concerning* the things spoken of,—their abstract truth, or philosophic beauty, or systematic completeness;—but we believe *the things*

*themselves*; we receive from the whole truth a corresponding impression on the whole mind; we act under its influence; we humbly, yet “boldly” enter the “holiest of all;” we fill our mouths with arguments,—such arguments as God has promised to regard; by them we direct the Divine eye from our own unworthiness to *his* worth in whom we confide; that eye beholding there an adequate and equitable reason for the exercise of mercy, admits and approves the plea; upon this the compassion of his personal, and the rectitude of his official character completely coincide; “accepted *in* the beloved,” our sin is virtually, and our liability to punishment actually, destroyed; we are, as to legal consequences, placed in the condition, and clothed with the character, of those who have vindicated and established their personal virtue; we are regarded and treated *as if we were* just; we are pronounced free; we have liberty and life secured to us; we are *pardoned*; we are *justified*; we are *justified by faith*.

That is to say;—with respect to God, we are justified in consequence of his perception of the inherent sufficiency of the work of Christ, to constitute the ground of forgiveness; with respect to ourselves, we are justified, in consequence of our reception of the Divine testimony concerning it.



## V.

The only remaining object of attention, is to endeavour to detect the point of coincidence between the New Testament view of this subject, and that involved in the account of "the father of the faithful."

"Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness." "Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead." Now, I think it would be plausible to say, that the point of which we are in search,—the point of coincidence between the patriarch and us, is to be found, not in the identity of the truth believed, but in the identity of the act of believing,—that act, by which both parties equally exercise trust or confidence in the moral character and moral assurances of the same Being. It might be said, that Abraham did not believe that our Lord Jesus Christ was raised from the dead,—that truth was not presented to him; and, that we do not believe that our posterity are to be like the sands of the sea-shore,—that truth is not presented to *us*: but both, it might be added, do believe, with equal confidence, such

truths as are respectively presented to each. The illustration of the argument might then advance in this way:—Abraham believed what God promised respecting his seed in general, and Isaac in particular; he believed that, even though Isaac should perish on the altar, he would be raised up again from the dead, and that all that God had spoken would unquestionably be fulfilled. We believe that God *has* raised up his own Son from the dead, “who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification;” and we, too, believe, that all that God has spoken of our obtaining mercy through him, will unquestionably be fulfilled. The mental act in the two cases are identical, though the propositions are not. Confidence, the same in kind, is placed in promises the same in their origin, though different in nature. Neither the one nor the other of us has a personal righteousness, in consequence of which we can claim to be declared *just*; but both the one and the other have *that*, which He with whom we have to do, has promised to make the occasion of treating us *as if we were*.

I once thought this was the proper explanation. Further thought, however, leads me to reject it. The following reasons seem sufficient to warrant that rejection. In the first place, it cannot be, that the mere belief of



any truth whatever can possess such moral excellence, such meritorious efficiency, as, in itself, to constitute the ground of the forgiveness of sin. It would be very wrong *not* to believe the ever blessed God,—“the God that cannot lie;” this would be a flagrant insult to eternal truth; but, just for this very reason, the admission of his testimony can hardly be considered a thing as likely to appear to him so singularly virtuous. Again. The above opinion would make the ground of justification different with respect to different individuals; there would thus be a difference instead of an identity in the feeling and the song of the redeemed in heaven! Further. To make faith or believing, viewed simply in itself and as our act, the ground of forgiveness, would afford reason for boasting, and subvert the capital scripture truth of salvation by grace. Once more. The opinion in dispute would virtually make justification the result of an arbitrary appointment, an act of *mere* prerogative, of personal irresponsible will, which would contradict what has already been proved respecting moral government, or government according to law, which is the nature of the Divine. Lastly. It would be at variance with what appears to be the sense of other scriptures, in which the point of coincidence between

Abraham and us seems obviously alluded to, perhaps we might say, explained. Let us observe what these are.

You may remark, then, in general, that Abraham was a believer, had given proofs of faith, and was therefore, I apprehend, in a justified state, previous to the time in which the expression quoted by the Apostle occurs in his history. The very promise, too, with which it is connected, had been given before. The words are to be found in the fifteenth chapter of Genesis, appended, apparently, to a statement respecting the patriarch's seed; but the same promise, substantially, is found at the beginning of the twelfth chapter, and you will observe it is there recorded as what *had* been said to Abraham at the time of his call, that is, when he was first separated from surrounding idolaters, and brought into a new relation to God. It is also found repeated and amplified in the twenty-second chapter, at the period when the patriarch's faith was "perfected," was fully evinced to be sincere, by its most conspicuous and splendid manifestation. On the whole, I am inclined to think, first, that the expression is to be regarded not so much as a particular statement referring to the particular period in which it occurs, as a general statement of the general fact, that it was by believing God, and not

by obeying any law, that Abraham was justified. Then, secondly, as to the particular truth to which he had respect; as to *what it was* on which his faith terminated, and on account of which it availed to justification; that seems to be explained by Paul in a manner which accounts for the frequent recurrence of the promise to which we have been referring; and which gives the expression, just described as a general statement, a particular and specific significance in connexion with that promise.

The apostolic explanation to which we refer, is contained in the third chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians, and may be gathered from the following passages. It starts, you will perceive, as a general argument, opposing and contrasting faith and works,—promise and law; and then it advances to a particular explanation of *that* faith, and *that* promise, by which Abraham was justified. These we shall see, in the end, to be identical with our own.

“This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?—He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore

that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." So far all is general. Works of the law, and the hearing of faith, are broadly contrasted. In what follows, the line of observation is narrowed, and the precise nature of *that* "hearing of faith," which justifies and saves, is distinctly illustrated. "The scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed." "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse;" but "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us;" "that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the law?" "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith."

“And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Now, from all this we learn,—that the gospel was preached to Abraham; that the covenant made with Abraham was confirmed in Christ; that the blessing which comes upon us through Christ, is the blessing of Abraham; that the promise respecting the seed of the patriarch had a reference to Christ; that for us to be in Christ, and heirs of the inheritance, is just to be what Abraham was, and to enjoy what he enjoyed. *That* which Abraham believed, therefore, and in virtue of which he was justified, was the assurance, however imperfectly communicated, of the pardon of sin through the merit of Messiah. It was the gospel in anticipation. With this view of the matter, as given by Paul, Peter, in the third chapter of the “Acts,” appears to coincide. “Ye are the children—of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.” Therefore, “unto you first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.” But still more strongly is our argument sustained by the memorable expression of the Lord himself—“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.”

On the whole, the point of coincidence between the patriarch and ourselves seems to be this. Abraham believed in a Saviour to come; we, in one who has appeared. In relation to himself, he was justified in consequence of his dependence on the Divine testimony concerning that Saviour; in relation to God, he was justified because that dependence pointed to *Him* who, "in the fulness of time," was to "give his life a ransom for many." In all ages, the ground of justification has been the same as to the *fact*, however indistinctly revealed and partially apprehended; and the faith of the justified has been "counted for righteousness" only in consideration of its uniting them with *it*. He who, in himself, is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever," has also, in his assumed functions and mediatorial worth, been virtually so, in the view of the Divine mind, and in his efficient relation to the church. "He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." He will be adored throughout the coming eternity by all of every dispensation, as "Him in whom they obtained redemption, through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

"Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou then how faith wrought



with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" Abraham, it appears, was justified by works as well as by faith; that is, by the one he was evinced to be, what he regarded himself in consequence of the other. On account of his faith, a person is treated as what he is *not*; on account of his works, he is treated as what he *is*. In the former case he is pardoned as a sinner; in the latter he is approved as a saint. I believe in the merit of good works: only, observe what *kind* of merit it is. Good works have no merit in relation to our pardon, but they *have* a merit in relation to our faith. He who abounds in them is not only a better man than he who does not, but, as a believer, he is accumulating the only properties that will pass the judgment-seat. The question at the bar of Christ will be, not do you—but *did* you believe? and the proof will be rested, not upon the splendour of external profession, nor the exercise of eloquent gifts, nor even the performance of miracles themselves; but it will be rested upon the "perfecting" of faith by the actings of that love which faith leads to, and which prompts to the most cheerful and the most strenuous fulfilling of the law. The works to which we refer, though works coincident with law, are not works *of* law; that is, they are not done in obedience to law *as a covenant*, and intended

to be presented to Justice, as a personal claim to acquittal and to recompense; but they are works congenial with the *spirit* of law, regulated by it as a rule, flowing from gratitude, and intended to be humbly presented to Mercy,—presented as an outward and intelligible token of the inward and practical sincerity with which the mind reposed on its provision and its promises. It is thus that the saint is justified as well as the sinner. And it is his delight that it is so. Holiness is the element of joy, and law is the measure of holiness. It is the glory of unfallen natures to be under it and obey it; it is the consummation of grace to induce in *us* a sympathy with *them*. The completeness of this sympathy will constitute at once our reward and our perfection; the display of its existence now, is essential to the evidence of a justified state. “A man may *say* he has faith;” but, unless it be “made perfect” by *works*, no one to whom he says it, is bound to believe him.

## VI.

We are thus brought to the general conclusion of all we had projected on the character of Abraham. As in former discourses we illustrated the devotional and practical reflections inspired by the subject, it is unnecessary to

detain you now by any such remarks. In closing, however, the whole series to which the history of this eminent believer has given rise,—a series which has occupied the mornings of seven sabbaths; upon which some thought has been expended; and in the course of which many important principles have been developed; a number of feelings are excited, which, if time permitted, we should be glad to express. Whether we are or not, we certainly *ought* to be both wiser and better for the view we have taken of the patriarch's excellence. Our confidence in God should be stronger; we should be better prepared for trial; our minds should be more familiar with the fact that we are but "pilgrims on the earth," and our hopes should be more firmly fixed on the futurity beyond it.—In taking leave of the patriarch, we feel as if we were parting from a friend, with whom we had travelled far and long; with whom we had taken sweet counsel, and who, as we advanced, had gained on our affections. We experience a sort of reluctance to approach the last word;—we are conscious of something like regret, in closing the subject, as if it reminded us of the termination of all human engagements, and warned us that "the end of all things is at hand."—"The fathers, where are they? and the prophets—the patriarchs—

do they live for ever?" Yes, they *do* live for ever. God is at this moment "the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, and he is not the God of the dead, but of the living." "Life and immortality have been brought to light by the gospel." "The darkness is past and the true light now shineth." "Let us be followers of those who through faith and patience are inheriting the promises." Let us often reflect upon the happiness of such as shall compose "the general assembly and church of the first-born," who shall be "gathered together from the ends of the earth, and the isles of the sea;" "who shall come unto mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, and to an innumerable company of angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling;"—who, "washed in that blood,"—"cleansed, and justified, and sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God," "shall be presented to him, at length, as a perfect church, having neither spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."—May the God of Abraham grant that you and I may be there.

FINIS.









